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The Radicalism of Shelley and Its Sources

FRAMINGHAM, MASS.

BY
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A DISSERTATION

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THE RADICALISM OF SHELLEY AND ITS SOURCES[1]

By Daniel J. McDonald, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

The following study of the development of the religious and political views of Shelley is made with the view to help one in forming a true estimate of his work and character.

That there is a real difficulty in estimating correctly the life and works of Shelley no one acquainted with the varied judgments passed upon him will deny. Professor Trent claims that there is not a more perplexing and irritating subject for study than Shelley.[2] By some our poet is regarded as an angel, a model of perfection; by others he is looked upon as "a rare prodigy of crime and pollution whose look even might infect." Mr. Swinburne calls him "the master singer of our modern poets," but neither Wordsworth nor Keats could appreciate his poetry. W. M. Rossetti, in an article on Shelley in the ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica, writes as follows: "In his own day an alien in the world of mind and invention, and in our day scarcely yet a denizen of it, he appears destined to become in the long vista of years an informing presence in the innermost shrine of human thought." Matthew Arnold, on the other hand, in one of his last essays, writes: "But let no one suppose that a want of humor and a self-delusion such as Shelley's have no effect upon a man's poetry. The man Shelley, in very truth, is not entirely sane, and Shelley's poetry is not entirely sane either." Views so entirely different, coming as they do from such eminent critics are surely perplexing. Nevertheless, there seems to be a light which can illuminate this difficulty, render intelligible his life and works, and help us to form a just estimate of them.

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[1] A dissertation submitted to the Catholic University of America in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, June, 1912.

[2] Trent, *The Authority of Criticism and Other Essays.*

This light is a comprehension of the influence which inspired him in all he did and all he wrote—in a word, a comprehension of his radicalism. A great deal of the difficulty connected with the study of Shelley arises from ignorance concerning radicalism itself. I shall therefore begin by giving a short description of its nature and function.

To many, radicalism is suggestive only of revolution and destruction. In their eyes it is the spouse of disorder and the mother of tyranny. Its devotees are wild-eyed fanatics, and in its train are found social outcasts and the scum of humanity. To others, radicalism presents a totally different aspect. These admit that it has been unfortunate in the quality of many of its adherents, but at the same time they claim that it has proven itself the mainspring of progress in every sphere of human activity. It is depicted as the cause of all the reforms achieved in society. Without it old ideas and principles would always prevail, and stagnation would result. "Conservative politicians," says Leslie Stephen, "owe more than they know to the thinkers (radicals) who keep alive a faith which renders the world tolerable and puts arbitrary rulers under some moral stress of responsibility."[3]

Although radicalism is a disposition found in every period of history, still the word itself is of comparatively recent origin. It first came into vogue about the year 1797, when Fox and Horne Tooke joined forces to bring about a "radical reform." In this epithet one finds the idea of going to the roots of a question, which was characteristic of eighteenth century philosophy. Then the expression seems to have disappeared for a time. In July, 1809, a writer in the *Edinburgh Review* says: "It cannot be doubted that there is at the moment . . . a very general desire for a more 'radical' reform than would be effected by a mere change of ministry."[4] It was not until 1817, however, that the adjective "radical" began to

[3] *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Chap. X.
[4] Cf. Halevy, *La Resolution et la Doctrine de L'Utilite.*

be used substantively. On August 18, 1817, Cartwright wrote to T. Northmore: "The crisis, in my judgment, is very favorable for effecting an union with the *radicals,* of the better among the Whigs, and I am meditating on means to promote it." In 1820 Bentham wrote a pamphlet entitled *Radicalism Not Dangerous,* and in this work he uses the word "radicalists" instead of "radicals."

For a long time the word "radical" was a term of reproach. Sir Fowell Buxton, speaking of the Radicals, says he was persuaded that their object was "the subversion of religion and of the constitution."

Since that time a radical has come to mean any root-and-branch reformer; and radicalism itself may be defined as a tendency to abolish existing institutions or principles. As soon as either of these seems to have outlived its usefulness, radicalism will clamor for its suppression. Discontent, then, is a source of radicalism. This, however, is of a dual nature—discontent with conditions and discontent with institutions or principles. Many conservatives indulge in the former, only radicals in the latter. Again radicalism is not a mere "tearing up by the roots," as the word is commonly interpreted, but is rather, as Philips Brooks writes, "a getting down to the root of things and planting institutions anew on just principles. An enlightened radicalism has regard for righteousness and good government, and will resist all enslavement to old forms and traditions, and will set them aside unless it shall appear that any of these have a radically just and defensible reason for their existence and continuance."

Radicalism thrives where conditions are favorable to a change in ideals. It aims to establish new institutions or to propagate new principles, and this presupposes new ideals. As the habits of a man tend to correspond to his ideals, so too the institutions of a nation conform in a broad way to its ideals. In England during the Middle Ages the institutions of the country were strongly influenced by the religious ideal;

later on, when the nation's ideal became national glory, they assumed a political character; and now they reflect the dominant influence which the economic ideal has exerted during the past century. The ideals of a people than are bound to undergo changes, and these are sometimes, though not always, for a nation's good. They are developed in the main by an increase in knowledge and by industrial change. Institutions, however, do not keep pace with this advance in ideals; and as a consequence discontent results and radicalism is born.

Moreover, institutions are never an adequate expression of the ideal. "Men are never as good as the goodness they know. Institutions reveal the same truth. The margin between what society knows and what it is" makes radicalism possible. In his introduction to *The Revolt of Islam,* Shelley expresses the same thought: "The French Revolution may be considered as one of those manifestations of a general state of feeling among civilized mankind produced by a defect of correspondence between the knowledge existing in society and the improvement or gradual abolition of political institutions." The greater that this defect of correspondence becomes, the more intense will be the radicalism that inevitably ensues.

Radicals want a change. The extent of this change differentiates them fairly well among themselves. Some would completely sweep away every existing institution. Thus Shelley thought the great victory would be won if he could exterminate kings and priests at a blow.

> Let the axe
> Strike at the root, the poison-tree will fall[5]

Others would be content with changes of a far less radical character. Burke, in his early life, was the most moderate of these. At a time when the British constitution was sorely in need of reform he said concerning it: "Never will I cut it in pieces and put it in the kettle of any magician in order to boil it with the puddle of their compounds into youth and

[5] *Queen Mab,* Canto IV.

vigor; on the contrary, I will drive away such pretenders; I will nurse its venerable age and with lenient arts extend a parent's breath." Between these two extremes many different degrees of radicalism obtain. In his *Ecce, Convertimur ad Gentes,* Arnold writes: "For twenty years I have felt convinced that for the progress of our civilization here in England three things were above all necessary: a reduction of those immense inequalities of condition and property among us of which our land system is the cause, a genuine municipal system, and public schools for the middle class."

A just appreciation of the radicalism of Shelley's poetry is impossible without a knowledge of the function of radicalism, and so it must be considered a little more in detail.

An attempt to abolish an institution is sure to encounter the opposition of those whose interests are bound up with that institution. The good that it has accomplished in the past is sufficient warrant for defending it against the onslaught of its assailants. *Le bien c'est l'ennemi du mieux.* No matter how inadequate the institution in queston may now be, it will still be championed by the great majority; and were it not for the radicals' enthusiasm and faith in their cause their opposition would be in vain. As a witty exponent of homespun philosophy expresses it: "Most people would rather be comfortable than be right." They may see that a change is needed, but they hold on to the old order of things as long as possible. Long before 1789 the French nobility realized that they should give up their claims to exemption from taxation, yet they retained them all until forced to relinquish them. Had the "privileges" been less conservative, the Revolution would never have occurred. It may be said then that radicalism is born of conservatism. Without it might would be right, and anything like justice would be well-nigh impossible.

Another factor in the development of radicalism is the inertia of mind and will of a great many people. Most persons are not easily induced to undertake anything that requires

some exertion. They prefer to sit back and let others bear the burdens of the day and its heat. A good example of this is the indifference shown by the French Catholics towards the oppressive legislation of their rulers. Fortunately, however, in those countries where free scope is given to the individual, and where liberty of speech is firmly established, there will always be found some who are ever ready to take the initiative in demanding a change. Their radicalism tends to counteract the influence of this sleeping sickness. It holds up to men the ideal, and inflames them with a desire of attaining it.

Again, the emotions do not move as fast as the intellect. They will cling to their objects long after the intellect has counselled otherwise.

> A man convinced against his will
> Is of the same opinion still.[6]

Radicalism presents to men an ideal state where everybody is bright and free and happy; and thus helps to detach the affections from beliefs and institutions which are no longer helpful. The emotions may not adhere to the radicals' scheme, but they are at least freed from their old bondage and can embrace the reforms of the less conservative. The influence that radicalism exerts in this way is a very powerful one. Everybody knows Carlyle's famous outburst of rhetoric bearing on this point: "There was once a man called Jean Jacques Rousseau. He wrote a book called *The Social Contract.* It was a theory and nothing but a theory. The French nobles laughed at the theory, and their skins went to bind the second edition of the book."

The strength of radicalism lies in the fact that it is poetical and philosophical. Through philosophy it makes its influence felt on a country's leaders, through poetry on the citizens themselves. Andrew Fletcher, of Saltown, has said: "Let me write a country's songs, and I don't care who makes its laws." The poet and the radical are brothers. Both live on abstrac-

[6] Samuel Butler, *Hudibras.*

tions. As soon as they particularize their mission fails; the one ceases to be a poet and the other a radical. In his admirable essay on Shelley, Francis Thompson tells clergymen that "poetry is the preacher to men of the earthly as you of the Heavenly Fairness." According to Saint-Beuve "the function of art is to disengage the elements of beauty, to escape from the mere frightful reality." Substitute radicalism for poetry and art in these quotations and they would still be true. Emerson calls the poets "liberating gods." The ancient bards had for the title of their order: "Those who are free throughout the world." "They are free and they make free." This is exactly what one would write about radicals. Poetry and radicalism then go hand in hand. When radicalism is in the ascendant, poetry will throb with the feverish energy of the people. It will not only be more abundant, but it will show more of real life—the stuff of which literature is made. In conservative times questions concerning life do not agitate men's minds to any great extent. People take things as they find them. Set men a thinking, however, place new ideals before them, and then you get a Shakespeare and a Milton or a galaxy of sparkling gems such as scintillated in the dawn of the nineteenth century.

We find then two tendencies which always exist in any progressive society—radicalism and conservatism. Both have appeared in connection with every phase of thought and human activity. Either, as Emerson has said, is a good half but an impossible whole. One is too impetuous, the other is too wary. The one rushes blindly into the future, the other clings too much to the past. There is constant warfare between the two for the mastery. In a progressive community neither of them is in the ascendant for any length of time. A period of radicalism is inevitably followed by one of conservatism and *vice versa*. The pendulum swings to one extreme and then back again to the other. As long as human nature will be what it is, our institutions will be defective, and change

will be the order of the day. This no doubt results in progress, which Goethe has compared to a movement in a spiral direction.

This action and reaction is reflected in the literature of a nation. No matter what definition of literature we may accept, whether it be Newman's personal use of language, Swinburne's imagination and harmony, or Matthew Arnold's criticism of life, it will always be found that literature is a crystallization of the ideals of the age. This is true both of poetry and of prose. The poet is not an isolated individual. On the contrary, he is peculiarly sensitive to the influences which surround him. He is the revealer and the awakener of these influences. "And the poet listens and he hears; and he looks and he sees; and he bends lower and lower and he weeps; and then growing with a strange growth, drawing from all the darkness about him his own transfiguration, he stands erect, terrible and tender, above all those wretched ones—those of high place as well as those of low, with flaming eyes."[7]

[7] *Open Court.*

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CHAPTER I

EARLY INFLUENCES

The intensity of one's radicalism depends on the extent to which the institutions of a country cause one suffering and disappointment. Shelley says in Julian and Maddalo:

> Most wretched men
> Are cradled into poetry by wrong,
> They learn in suffering what they teach in song.

A description of Shelley's radicalism then must take account of all the circumstances that tended to make him dissatisfied with existing institutions. Some of these circumstances may seem trifling, but then it must be remembered that events which appear insignificant sometimes have far-reaching effects. Pascal remarked once that the whole aspect of the world would be different if Cleopatra's nose had been a little shorter. The history of Shelley's life is a series of incidents which tended to make him radical. He never had a chance to be anything else. No sooner would he be brought in contact with conservative influences than something would happen to push him again on the high road of revolt. Even were he temperamentally conservative (and Hogg says that "his feelings and behavior were in many respects highly aristocratical"), the experiences that he underwent were of such a nature as to inevitably lead him into radicalism.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born at Field Place, in the county of Sussex, on Saturday, the 4th of August, 1792. His family was an ancient and honorable one whose history extends back to the days of the Crusades. His grandfather, Bysshe Shelley, born in America, accumulated a large fortune, married two heiresses, and in 1806 received a baronetcy. In his old age he became whimsical, greedy, and sullen. He was a skeptic hoping for nothing better than annihilation at the end of life.[1] With regard to the poet's father, it is very difficult to form

[1] *Ingpen*, Letter Jan. 26, 1812.

a just estimate. There is no doubt that Shelley enthusiasts decried the father too much in their efforts to canonize the son. It would indeed be strange to find any father at that time who would be capable of giving our poet that guidance and training which his nature demanded. It was a time when might was right, when the rod held a large place in the formation of a boy's character. We must not be too severe then on the father if he was unacquainted with the proper way of dealing with his erratic son. No one who has read Jeafferson's life of the poet will say that Bysshe treated his son too harshly. It was his judgment rather than his heart that was at fault. Medwin remarks that all he brought back from Europe was a smattering of French and a bad picture of an eruption of Vesuvius.

It is to his mother that Shelley owes his beauty and his good nature. He said that she was mild and tolerant, but narrow-minded. Very few references to the home of his boyhood are made in his poetry; and this leads us to believe that neither his father nor his mother had much influence over him.

In his childhood he seems to have had the day dreams and reveries that Wordsworth had. "Let us recollect our sensations as children," Shelley writes, in the *Essay on Life,* "What a distinct and intense apprehension had we of the world and of ourselves! . . . We less habitually distinguished all that we saw and felt from ourselves. They seemed, as it were, to constitute one mass. There are some persons who in this respect are always children. Those who are subject to the state called reverie feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being." In Book II of the *Prelude* Wordsworth gives expression to a similar experience:

> Oft in these moments such a holy calm
> Would overspread my soul that bodily eyes
> Were utterly forgotten, and what I saw
> Appeared like something in myself—a dream
> A prospect in the mind.

Shelley from the very beginning delighted in giving free scope to his imagination. In the garret of the house at Field Place he imagined there was an alchemist old and grey pondering over magic tomes. The "Great Old Snake" and the "Great Tortoise" were other wondrous creatures of his imagination that lived out of doors. He used to entertain his sisters with weird stories about hobgoblins and ghosts; and even got them to dress themselves so as to represent fiends and spirits. In the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty* he writes:

> While yet a boy I sought for ghosts and sped
> Thro' many a listening chamber, cave and ruin
> And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing,
> Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.

He was attached to the occult sciences and sometimes watched whole nights for ghosts. Once he described minutely a visit which he said he had paid to some neighbors, and it was discovered soon afterwards that the whole story was a fabrication.

At ten years of age he was sent to Sion House Academy, Isleworth, where he met his cousin and future biographer, Thomas Medwin. The other boys, Medwin tells us, considered him strange and unsocial. It was at this school that Shelley first became acquainted with the romantic novels of Anne Radcliffe and the other novelists of the School of Terror. Here too he became greatly interested in chemistry and astronomy. The idea of a plurality of worlds, through which we "should make the grand tour," enchanted him. Thus we see that he began very early to live in the unreal and the wonderful.

In 1804 he went to Eton, and there he was known as "Mad Shelley" and "Shelley the Atheist." The word "atheist" here does not mean one who denies the existence of God. According to Hogg, it was a term given to those who distinguished themselves for their opposition to the authorities of the school. The title must have fallen into disuse shortly after Shelley's time, as Professor Dowdon failed to find at Eton any trace

of this peculiar usage of the word. Here he became interested in physical experiments and carried them on at unseasonable hours. For this he was frequently reprimanded by his superiors, but he proved to be very untractable.

At Eton Shelley became acquainted with Dr. Lind, whom he immortalized as a hermit in *The Revolt of Islam* and as Zonoras in *Prince Athanase.* It was Dr. Lind, according to Hogg, who gave Shelley his first lessons in French philosophism. Jeafferson says that he taught Shelley to curse his superiors and to write letters to unsuspecting persons to trip them up with catch questions and then laugh at them.[8]

An event occurred in the summer of 1810 which had considerable influence in developing the radicalism of Shelley. He had known and loved his cousin, Harriet Grove, from childhood, and during the vacation of this year asked her to be his wife. Harriet's family, however, became alarmed at his atheistical tendencies and made her give up all communications with him. This angered him very much, and made him declaim against what he considered to be bigotry and intolerance. In a letter to Hogg, December 20, 1810, he writes: "O! I burn with impatience for the moment of the dissolution of intolerance; it has injured me. I swear on the altar of perjured love to revenge myself, on the hated cause of the effect; which even now I can scarcely help deploring. . . . Adieu! Down with bigotry! Down with intolerance! In this endeavour your most sincere friend will join his every power, his every feeble resource. Adieu!" And in a letter of January 3, 1811: "She is no longer mine! She abhors me as a skeptic as what she was before! Oh, bigotry! When I pardon this last, this severest of thy persecutions, may Heaven (if there be wrath in Heaven) blast me!" These ravings show Shelley to have been nervous, hysterical, and supersensitive.

The breaking of this engagement with Harriet made such an impression on him as to convince him that he should combat

[8] *The Real Shelley,* Vol. I, p. 97.

all those influences which caused the rupture. The story of Shelley's life might have been an entirely different one had he been allowed to marry Harriet Grove. Man is a stubborn animal. Once he takes up a certain side, opposition merely serves to strengthen his convictions and make him fight all the harder. If Shelley's willfulness had been ignored instead of opposed, I have no doubt that he would have seen things in their proper light and would never have been the rabid radical that he became. An Etonian called once on Shelley in Oxford and asked him if he meant to be an atheist there too. "No!" he answered, "certainly not. There is no motive for it; they are very civil to us here; it is not like Eton."[9] It is Medwin's conviction that Shelley never completely overcame his love for Harriet. Hogg notes that as late as 1813 Shelley loved to play a simple air that Harriet taught him. In the *Epipsychidion* he refers to her thus: "And one was true—Oh! why not true to me?" Love was to Shelley what religion is to the ascetic. He could not understand why one should put obstacles in the way of anyone in love, and so he thinks himself in duty bound to fight everything that supports this hated intolerance. This led him to wage war against religion itself.

Shelley entered University College, Oxford, in the Michaelmas term of 1810. It was unfortunate for him that conditions at the university were as deplorable as they were. He did not find there the intellectual food that his mind needed, and no doubt his sensitive soul was scandalized by what it felt. Intellectual life there was dull. Mark Pattison[10] says Oxford was nothing more than a grammar school, the college tutors were a little inferior to public school directors, and they obtained their positions through favoritism and not through merit. Copleston, a defender of the university against the attacks of the *Edinburgh Review*, admitted that only ex-

[9] Hogg: *Life of Shelley*, p. 136.
[10] *Oxford Studies* (1855), quoted in *Koszul*, p. 59.

treme incapacity or flagrant idleness would prevent a student from obtaining his degree at the end of his course. Fynes Clinton, in his *Autobiography,* tells us that Greek studies at Christ Church were very much neglected. During his seven years of residence grammar, syntax, prosody were never mentioned. Students rarely attended lectures. Much of their time was passed in hunting, drinking, and every kind of debauchery. "At boarding schools of every description," writes Mrs. Wollstonecraft, "the relaxation of the junior boys is mischief; and of the senior, vice. Besides, in great schools, what can be more prejudicial to the moral character than the system of tyranny and abject slavery which is established among the boys, to say nothing of the slavery to forms, which makes religion worse than a farce? For what good can be expected from the youth who receives the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, to avoid forfeiting half-a-guinea, which he probably afterwards spends in some sensual manner?"[11] Such was the atmosphere in which Shelley was placed, and it is little wonder that it hastened the growth of the seeds of discontent and revolt which had been already implanted in his soul.

Misfortune still pursued Shelley. Had he formed friendships at Oxford with men of sober intellect, the whole course of his life might have been changed. Unfortunately he soon found a kindred spirit in the cynic Hogg.

This friend of Shelley gives us minute details of the poet's life there. He thinks that Shelley took up skeptical philosophy because of the advantage it gave him in argument. *Hume's Essays* was a favorite book with Shelley, and he was always ready to put forward in argument its doctrines. It may seem strange that this cold skeptical philosophy appealed to such an imaginative poet as Shelley; but destruction, as Hogg remarks, so that it be on a grand scale, may sometimes prove hardly less inspiring than creation. "The feat of the magician

[11] *Rights of Woman,* Ch. 12, p. 174.

who, by the touch of his wand, could cause the great pyramid to dissolve into the air would be as surprising as the achievement of him who by the same rod could instantly raise a similar mass in any chosen spot."

On September 18, 1810, Stockdale offered for sale a volume of poetry by Shelley entitled "*Original Poetry*: by Victor and Cazire." The book was not out long when it was discovered that many of the poems were stolen property—a fraud on the public and an infringement of at least one writer's copyright. The book was at once withdrawn and suppressed. Some doubt exists as to the name of the person who cooperated with Shelley in producing this book. Shelley enthusiasts say that Shelley was the unsuspicious victim of an unworthy coadjutor. Jeafferson is of the opinion that Shelley was fully conscious of the fraud that was being done. This biographer maintains that Shelley was an inveterate liar.

"About this time," says Stockdale, "not merely slight hints but constant allusions, personally and by letters, . . . rendered me extremely uneasy respecting Mr. Shelley's religious, or indeed irreligious, sentiments." Shelly's father too was worrying at this time about his son's loss of faith. He may have received the first intimation of his son's speculations from a criticism in *The Critical Review* of another work of Shelley's, *Zastrozzi,* in which the unknown author was condemned as an offender against morality and a corrupter of youth. The irate father wrote to his son and severely reprimanded him for his conduct.

In a letter to Hogg, Shelley says: "My father wrote to me, and I am now surrounded, environed by dangers, to which compared the devils who besieged St. Anthony were all inefficient. They attack me for my detestable principles. I am reckoned an outcast, yet I defy them, and laugh at their ineffectual efforts, etc." And in another letter: "My mother imagines me to be on the highroad to Pandemonium; she fancies I want to make a deistical coterie of my little sisters.

How laughable!" Shelley imagines the whole world is against him. He feels very keenly his isolation. He says his "soul was bursting." There is a relief though. "I slept with a loaded pistol and some poison last night, but did not die."

Shelley thought he was called upon to come to the aid of all those in distress. We find him at this time aiding aspiring authors, and defending traitorous politicians. An Irish journalist, Peter Finnerty, was condemned for libel and sentenced to eighteen months' imprisonment in Lincoln jail. Shelley contributed to a subscription list in aid of Finnerty and also wrote a poem entitled *A Poetical Essay on the Existing State of Things* to help on the cause. Leigh and John Hunt, who defended Finnerty in *The Examiner,* were tried for seditious libel and acquitted. Shelley rejoiced over their triumph, and wrote the following letter to Leigh Hunt congratulating him and proposing a scheme for the mutual defense of all friends of "rational liberty."

University College, Oxford,
March 2, 1811.

Sir:—Permit me, although a stranger, to offer my sincerest congratulations on the occasion of that triumph so highly to be prized by men of liberality; permit me also to submit to your consideration, as one of the most fearless enlighteners of the public mind at the present time, a scheme of mutual safety and mutual indemnification for men of public spirit and principle, which, if carried into effect, would evidently be productive of incalculable advantages.

The ultimate intention of my aim is to induce a meeting of such enlightened, unprejudiced members of the community . . . and to form a methodical society, which should be organized so as to resist the coalition of the enemies of liberty. . . . It has been for the want of societies of this nature that corruption has attained the height at which we behold it; nor can any of us bear in mind the very great influence which, some years since, was gained by *Illuminism,* without considering that a society of equal extent might establish rational liberty on as firm a basis as that which would have supported the visionary schemes of a completely equalized community. . . .

On account of the responsibility to which my residence in this university subjects me, I, of course, dare not publicly avow all that I think; but the time will come when I hope that my every endeavor, insufficient as they may be, will be directed to the advancement of liberty.

Your most obedient servant,

P. B. Shelley.

One of the books read by Shelley at this time was the Abbé Barruel's *Memoires pour servir a l'histoire du Jacobinisme,* which contains an account of the Society of Illuminists. The remarkable success of this society in propagating free thought and revolutionary principles evidently inspired Shelley to attempt the formation of a similar society in England. His proposals, though, fell on deaf ears, and it is probable that Leigh Hunt did not even acknowledge the receipt of Shelley's letter.

In February, 1811, a small pamphlet, *The Necessity of Atheism,* which was written by Shelley, was published anonymously. According to Hogg, Shelley had a custom of writing to divines and engaging them in controversy on the existence of God. *The Necessity of Atheism* is merely an elaboration of the arguments of these letters. The masters and some of the fellows of Oxford sent for Shelley and asked him if he were the author of the work. He replied that they should produce their evidence, if they could prove he wrote it, and not question him because it was neither just nor lawful to interrogate him in such a case and for such a purpose. Shelley refused to answer their questions and was given one day in which to leave the college. His friend Hogg shared the same fate for the same reason. Shelley never received any admonition nor hint that his speculations were improper. Hogg says "there can be no reasonable doubt that he would at once have acceded to whatever had been proposed to him by authority."[12] Every kind of disorder was tolerated at the university, and Shelley and Hogg had no suspicion that their metaphysical speculations were considered so much worse than drunkenness and immorality.

[12]Hogg, *Life of Shelley,* p. 71.

If the sentence was not unjust, it was at least needlessly harsh. Shelley felt the sting of this disgrace very keenly, and it did much to embitter him against all kinds of authority.

Shelley and Hogg proceeded to London after their expulsion and obtained rooms in Poland Street. The name reminded Shelley of Kosciusko and Freedom. Timothy Shelley wrote to his son, commanding him to abstain from all communication with Hogg and place himself "under the care and society of such gentlemen as he should appoint" under pain of being deprived of all pecuniary aid. Shelley refused to comply with these proposals. Toward the middle of April Hogg left London to settle down to his legal training in York.

It was about this time that Shelley became acquainted with Harriet Westbrook. She wrote him from London that she was wretchedly unhappy, that she was about to be forced to go to school, and wanted to know if it would be wrong to put an end to her miserable life. Another letter from her soon followed, in which she threw herself upon his protection and proposed to fly with him. Shelley hastened to London, and after the delay of a few weeks eloped with Harriet to Edinburgh, where they were married on August 28, 1811. Shelley agreed to go through the ceremony of matrimony to save his wife from the social disgrace that would otherwise fall upon her.

Writing to Miss Hitchener on March 14, 1812, Harriet says. "I thought if I married anyone it should be a clergyman. Strange idea this, was it not? But being brought up in the Christian religion, 'twas this first gave rise to it. You may conceive with what horror I first heard that Percy was an atheist; at least so it was given out at Clapham. At first I did not comprehend the meaning of the word; therefore when it was explained I was truly petrified. . . . I little thought of the rectitude of these principles and when I wrote to him I used to try to shake them—making sure he was in the wrong, and that myself was right. . . . Now, however, this is entirely

done away with, and my soul is no longer shackled with such idle fears." This would indicate that he spent more time proselytizing Harriet than in making love to her.

It has been said that Harriet's sister, Elizabeth, managed the whole affair, and that the marriage was brought about through her successful plotting.[13] After spending five weeks in Edinburgh, Shelley, Harriet, and Hogg went to York. They were joined there by Elizabeth, who henceforth ruled over Shelley's household with a stern hand. She is partly responsible for the estrangement of Shelley and his wife.

During all this time Shelley was in need of money, and shortly after their arrival at York went south to induce his father to provide them with the means of living. While he was absent Hogg tried to seduce Harriet. Shelley sought an explanation from Hogg, and pardoned him "fully and freely." Shelley's account of the affair in a letter to Miss Hitchener savors much of Godwinism. "I desired to know fully the account of this affair. I heard it from him and I believe he was sincere. All I can recollect of that terrible day was that I pardoned him—fully, freely pardoned him; that I would still be a friend to him and hoped soon to convince him how lovely virtue was; that his crime, not himself, was the object of my detestation; that I value a human being not for what it has been but for what it is; that I hoped the time would come when he would regard this horrible error with as much disgust as I did."[14]

Early in November, Shelley, his wife, and Eliza left York suddenly for Keswick. Shelley's father and grandfather feared that the poet would parcel out the family estate to soul-mates, and so they proposed to allow him £2,000 a year if he would consent to entail the property on his eldest son, and

[13] "Il est vrai que Shelley courait un peu a l'amour de Harriet comme MacBeth courait au meurtre de Duncan. 'Ce qu'il faisait ressemblait plutot a un coup de volonte qu' a un elan de passion."—*La Jeunesse de Shelley*, Koszul, p. 86.

[14] *Ingpen*, Vol. I, p. 155.

in default of issue, on his brother. The proposition was indignantly rejected. He considered that kinship bore that relation to reason which a band of straw does to fire. "I am led to love a being not because it stands in the physical relation of blood to me but because I discern an intellectual relationship."

Early in 1812 Shelley started a correspondence with William Godwin, to whom he was then a stranger. In his first letter he writes: "The name of Godwin has been used to excite in me feelings of reverence and admiration. I have been accustomed to consider him a luminary too dazzling for the darkness which surrounds him. From the earliest period of my knowledge of his principles I have ardently desired to share, on the footing of intimacy, that intellect which I have delighted to contemplate in its emanations."

Godwin's influence with the revolutionists of this time was great. Coleridge and Southey were his ardent disciples for a time. "Throw aside your books of chemistry," said Wordsworth to a student, "and read Godwin on necessity." This philosopher seemed to provide them with a simple, comprehensive code of morality, which gave unlimited freedom to the reason, and justice as complete as possible to the individual.

In February, 1812, the Shelleys went to Dublin to help on the cause of moral and intellectual reform. He published there an "Address to the Irish People" which he had written during his stay at Keswick. Shelley's mission was moral and educational rather than political. He advocated Catholic Emancipation and the Repeal of the Union; but he thought that he should first of all strive to dispel bigotry and intolerance—"to awaken a noble nation from the lethargy of despair."[15] What Irishmen needed most of all were knowledge, sobriety, peace, benevolence—in a word, virtue and wisdom. "When you have these things," he said, "you may defy the tyrant." It is not surprising that his mission turned out to be

[15] *Hogg*, Vol. II, p. 52.

a fiasco. Godwin wrote Shelley several letters in which he tried to convince him that his pamphlets and Association would stir up strife and rebellion. "Shelley," he writes, "you are preparing a scene of blood." The poet accordingly withdrew his pamphlets from circulation and quitted Ireland.

Shelley then crossed over to Wales, and after a short residence at Nangwillt settled at Lynmouth. Elizabeth Hitchener, "the sister of his soul,"[16] joined them there. The poet first met her at Cuckfield while visiting his uncle, Captain Pilfold. She was a schoolmistress, professing very liberal opinions and possessing "a tongue of energy and an eye of fire." Everybody that Shelley admired seemed to him perfect, while those whom he disliked were fiends. Their correspondence, which extends over a period of more than a year, gives us a good picture of the workings of Shelley's mind during this time. They all moved to London in November. It was not to be expected that a combination of even such disinterested, enlightened superior mortals as these could last long. Elizabeth's influence over Shelley soon began to wane. His dislike for her was equalled only by his former extravagant praise. She was no longer his angel, but was now known as the "Brown Demon." "She is," he writes, "an artful, superficial, ugly, hermaphroditical beast of a woman, and my astonishment at my fatuity, inconsistency, and bad taste was never so great as after living four months with her as an inmate. What would hell be were such a woman in heaven?" Miss Hitchener took her leave of the Shelleys and again became a schoolmistress.

Shelley and his family spent some time in Wales and Dublin and then returned again to London in April, 1813.

It was about this time that he finished *Queen Mab*. On February 19, 1813, Shelley wrote to Hookham, his publisher: "You will receive *Queen Mab* with the other poems; I think that the whole should form one volume." Medwin says that

[16] Wordsworth uses this expression in the conclusion of *The Prelude*.

he commenced this work in the autumn of 1809. "After his expulsion he reverted to his *Queen Mab* commenced a year and a half before, and converted what was a mere imaginative poem into a systematic attack on the institutions of society." What was it that induced him to make the change? There is no doubt but it was his experience of the misery and suffering around him that prompted him to attack society as he did.

Radicalism, as has already been shown, springs from discontent. The worse existing conditions are, the more pronounced will be the radicalism that usually arises. Conditions—moral, political and social—during the latter half of the eighteenth century were very bad indeed. In his inimitable sketches of the four Georges, Thackeray asserts that the dissoluteness of the nation was awful. He depicts the lives of its princes, courtiers, men of rank and fashion as idle, profligate, and criminal. "Around a young king himself of the most exemplary life and undoubted piety lived a court society as dissolute as our country ever knew." Education was sadly neglected. In Richardson's *Sir Charles Grandison,* published 1753, Charlotte gives an account of her two lovers. One of them is an ideal specimen of the young nobility and is represented as spelling pretty well for a lord. In Ireland, the colonies, and even in England itself, oppression was well-nigh intolerable. Byron's *Age of Bronze* contains a good description of the way in which the landlords treated their tenants. The changes that followed in the wake of the Industrial Revolution caused untold suffering. The spread of machinery destroyed the old domestic industries of spinning and weaving, and many were consequently deprived of their most important source of subsistence. Children took up the places of the master craftsmen; and the amount of misery that this substitution entailed to both children and craftsmen is almost incredible.[17] Politics was rotten to the core. Even the great commoner, William Pitt, has been convicted by Macaulay, of

[17]Cf. *The Excursion,* Book VIII.

sacrificing his principles without any scruple whatever. The political corruption started by Walpole was organized into a system. Every man had his price. "Politicians are mere jobbers; officers are gamblers and bullies; the clergy are contemned and are contemptible; low spirits and nervous disorders have notoriously increased, until the people are no longer capable of self-defense."[18] In their struggle with the Stuarts the people were completely victorious; but it soon became apparent that they had simply substituted one evil for another. The despotism exercised by the Stuarts was now practiced by the Dodingtons and the Winningtons. Burke observes: "The distempers of monarchy were the great subjects of apprehension and redress in the last century. In this the distempers of Parliament."

The House of Commons was not responsible to anybody; and its members showed very little consideration for their constituents. Persons who were not acceptable to the ruling party were often fined and imprisoned without due process of law. It is little wonder then that Godwin, Shelley, and others declaimed against all forms of government. They were acquainted only with the Parliament of the Georges and the oligarchy of the Stuarts, and the one was as bad as the other.

The national debt was trebled in the space of twenty years, thus imposing heavy sacrifices on all. There was an income-tax of two shillings on a pound sterling; but the taxes which caused the most suffering to the poor were the indirect taxes on wheat, shoes, salt, etc. In 1815 a law was passed prohibiting the importation of wheat for less than eighty shillings the quarter.[19] No doubt the wealth of the country became very great through the development of new resources, but it was distributed among the few and gave no relief to the common people.

The poor laws were working astounding evils. With wheat

[18] Leslie Stephen: *English Thought in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. II.
[19] *Koszul*, p. 340.

at a given price, the minimum on which a man with wife and one child could subsist was settled; and whenever the family earnings fell below the estimated minimum, the deficiency was to be made up from the rates. In this way the path to pauperism was made so easy and agreeable that a large portion of the laboring classes drifted along it. This system set a premium on improvidence if not on vice. The inevitable effect was that wages fell as doles increased, that paupers so pensioned were preferred by the farmers to independent laborers, because their labor was cheaper, and that independent laborers, failing to get work except at wages forced down to a minimum, were constantly falling into the ranks of pauperism. It was not until 1834 that "a new poor law" was enacted which eliminated these evils.[20]

From one end of the kingdom to the other the prisons were a standing disgrace to civilization. Imprisonment from whatever cause it might be imposed meant consignment to a living tomb. Jails were pesthouses, in which a disease, akin to our modern typhus, flourished often in epidemic form. They were mostly private institutions leased out to ruthless, rapacious keepers who used every menace and extortion to wring money out of the wretched beings committed to their care. Prisons were dark because their managers objected to pay the window tax. Pauper prisoners were nearly starved, for there was no regular allowance of food. Howard's crusade against prison mismanagement produced tangible results, but after his death the cause of prison reform soon dropped, the old evils revived, and at the beginning of the nineteenth century were everywhere visible.[21]

The Church of England, it appears, had become an object of contempt. No doubt Selwyn's *Dr. Warner* is a distorted picture of the clergymen of the time; yet there is reason to believe that Anglican parsons were not very much concerned

[20] Cf. *Social England*, Trail and Mann, p. 825, also *The Political History of England*, by Broderick and Fotheringham, p. 340.

[21] *Social England*, Trail and Mann, p. 665.

with the salvation of souls. "The Church had become a vast machine for the promotion of her own officers. How admirable an investment is Religion! Such is the burden of their pleading!"

Some of the conventionalities of the age were so absurd as to engender sooner or later a spirit of revolt. Servants said "your honor" and "your worship" at every moment: tradesmen stood hat in hand as the gentlemen passed by: chaplains said grace and retired before the pudding. "In the days when there were fine gentlemen, Mr. Secretary Pitt's under-secretaries did not dare to sit down before him; but Mr. Pitt, in his turn, went down on his gouty knees to George II; and when George III spoke a few kind words to him, Lord Chatham burst into tears of reverential joy and gratitude; so awful was the idea of the monarch, and so great the distinction of rank."[22] Not to use hair powder was an unpardonable offence. Southey and Savage Landor were among the first to appear with their hair in *statu naturali* and this action of theirs produced an extraordinary sensation.

Caleb Williams, written by William Godwin in 1793, is a severe indictment of the customs and institutions of England. "Things as they are," is the subtitle of the work, and on that account an outline of the work will supplement the review of society already given. *"Caleb Williams,"* writes Professor Dowden, "is the one novel of the days of revolution embodying the new doctrine of the time which can be said to survive."[23]

In the first preface to *Caleb Williams* Godwin says that the story is "a study and delineation of things passing in the moral world. Its object is to show that the spirit and character of the Government intrudes itself into every rank of society." "Accordingly," he writes, "it was proposed in the invention of the following work to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a general

[22] Thackeray, *The Four Georges.*
[23] *The French Revolution and English Literature,* p. 76.

review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man."

Caleb Williams shortly after the death of his father, became secretary of Ferdinand Falkland, a country squire living in a remote county of England. Mr. Falkland's mode of living was very recluse and solitary. He avoided men and did not seem to have any friends in whom he confided. He scarcely ever smiled, and his manners plainly showed that he was troubled and unhappy. He was considerate to others, but he never showed a disposition to lay aside the stateliness and reserve which he assumed. Sometimes he was hasty, peevish, and tyrannical, and would even lose entirely his self-possession.

Mr. Collins, Falkland's steward, tells Williams that their master was not always thus, that he was once the gayest of the gay. In response to Caleb's entreaties, Collins unfolds as much as he knows of their master's history. He tells him that Mr. Falkland spent several years abroad and distinguished himself wherever he went by deeds of gallantry and virtue. At length he returned to England with the intention of spending the rest of his days on his estate. His nearest neighbor, Barnabas Tyrrel, was insupportably arrogant, tyrannical to his inferiors and insolent to his equals. On account of his wealth, strength, and copiousness of speech he was regarded with admiration by some, but with awe by all. The arrival of Mr. Falkland threatened to deprive Tyrrel of his authority and commanding position in the community. Tyrrel contemplated the progress of his rival with hatred and aversion. The dignity, affability, and kindness of Mr. Falkland were the subject of everybody's praise, and all this was an insupportable torment to Tyrrel.

Emily Melville, Tyrrel's cousin, who lived with him, falls in love with Falkland and consequently incurs her patron's displeasure. He resolved to impose an uncouth, boorish youth on her as a husband. She is imprisoned in her room for refusing, and is saved from a diabolical plot to ruin her through the timely assistance of Falkland. While still de-

lirious and suffering from the ill-treatment of her persecutor, Emily was arrested and cast into prison by Tyrrel for a debt contracted for board and lodging during the last fourteen years. Death liberated her soon afterwards from the persecutions of her cousin.

One of Tyrrel's tenants, Mr. Hawkins, incurred his master's displeasure, and he and his family were turned out of house and home. The laws and customs of the country are used to oppress the victims. Tenants must be kept in their places. The presumption is that they are in the wrong, and so the unscrupulous Tyrrel had no difficulty in imprisoning the son. Shelley says: "That in questions of property there is a vague but most effective favoritism in courts of law, and, among lawyers, against the poor to the advantage of the rich—against the tenant in favour of the landlord—against the creditor in favour of the debtor." (Prose, Vol. II, p. 326.) Falkland remonstrated with Tyrrel for this piece of injustice, but this served only to increase Tyrrel's hatred of him. At length the crisis came. Tyrrel is driven out of a rural assembly by Falkland. He returned soon afterwards, struck Falkland, felled him to the earth, and kicked him in the presence of all. Falkland was disgraced, and to him disgrace was worse than death. "He was too deeply pervaded with the idle and groundless romances of chivalry ever to forget the situation, humiliating and dishonourable according to his idea, in which he had been placed upon this occasion. To be knocked down, cuffed, kicked, dragged along the floor! Sacred heaven, the memory of such a treatment was not to be endured." Next morning Mr. Tyrrel was found dead in the street, having been murdered at a short distance from the assembly-house. That day marked the beginning of that melancholy which pursued Falkland in after years. The public disgrace and chastisement that had been imposed upon him were not the whole of the mischief that happened to the unfortunate Falkland. It was rumored that he was the

murderer of his antagonist. He was examined by the neighboring magistrates and acquitted. It was absurd to imagine that a man of such integrity should commit such an atrocious crime. Suspicion then fell on the Hawkinses. They were tried, condemned, and afterwards executed. From thenceforward the habits of Falkland became totally different. He now became a rigid recluse. Everybody respected him because of his benevolence, but his stately coldness and reserve rendered it impossible for those about him to regard him with the familiarity of affection.

Caleb Williams turned all these particulars over and over in his mind and began to suspect that Falkland was the real murderer of Tyrrel. His curiosity became an overpowering passion which was ultimately the cause of all his misfortunes. Falkland realizes that his secretary is convinced of his guilt, so he determines to silence him forever. He calls Williams into his room and confesses his guilt to him. Falkland said that he allowed the innocent Hawkinses to die because he could not sacrifice his fame. He would leave behind him a spotless and illustrious name even should it be at the expense of the death and misery of others. He then told Caleb that if ever an ungrounded word escaped from his lips he would pay for it by his death or worse. This secret was a constant source of torment to Williams. Every trifling incident made Falkland suspicious and consequently increased the misery of his secretary. At length Caleb flees, but is taken back, falsely accused of theft, and cast into prison. In all this Falkland contrives to manage things so as to increase his reputation for benevolence. Williams is made to appear an ungrateful wretch. The impotence of the law to secure justice to the weak is only equalled by the wretchedness of the prisons to which they are condemned. "Thank God," exclaims the Englishman, "we have no Bastile! Thank God with us no man can be punished without a crime!" "Unthinking wretch!" replies Godwin, "is that a country of liberty, where thousands lan-

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guish in dungeons and fetters? Go, go, ignorant fool! and visit the scenes of our prisons. Witness their unwholesomeness, their filth, the tyranny of their governors, the misery of their inmates! After that show me the man shameless enough to triumph, and say 'England has no Bastile!' Is there any charge so frivolous, upon which men are not consigned to those detested abodes? Is there any villainy that is not practiced by justices and prosecutors, etc.?"

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Williams tries to escape from prison and is caught in the attempt. He was then treated more cruelly than ever. He made another attempt to escape and was successful. The rest of the novel is taken up with an account of all that Williams suffered in his endeavors to keep out of the reach of the law. He falls in with a band of outlaws whose rude natural virtues are contrasted with the meanness and corruption of the officers of the law. He is at last caught, but Falkland, to make himself appear magnanimous, does not press the charge against Williams. Instead he persecutes Caleb by poisoning people's minds against him. Everywhere Caleb goes he is followed by an emissary of Falkland who contrives to convince people that Williams is an ungrateful scoundrel. He can stand the persecution no longer and so determines to accuse Falkland of the murder of Tyrrel. Williams does this in a way to carry conviction to his hearers. Falkland finally breaks down, throws himself into Williams' arms, saying, "All my prospects are concluded. All that I most ardently desired is forever frustrated. I have spent a life of the basest cruelty to cover one act of momentary vice, and to protect myself against the prejudice of my species. . . . And now (turning to the magistrates) do with me as you please. If, however, you wish to punish me, you must be speedy in your justice; for, as reputation was the blood that warmed my heart, so I feel that death and infamy must seize me together." He survived this event but three days. "A nobler spirit than Falkland's," Godwin writes, "lived not

among the sons of men. Thy intellectual powers were truly sublime, and thy bosom burned with a godlike ambition. But of what use are talents and sentiments in the corrupt wilderness of human society? It is a rank and rotten soil, from which every finer shrub draws poison as it grows. Falkland! thou enteredst upon thy career with the purest and most laudable intentions. But thou imbibest the poison of chivalry with thy earliest youth; and the base and low-minded envy that met thee on thy return to thy native seats, operated with this poison to hurry thee into madness. . . ." All these evils flow from Falkland's standard of morals—and his is the aristocratic, traditional one. He is the victim of the false ideal of chivalry. The errors of Falkland, Shelley writes, "sprang from a high though perverted conception of human nature, from a powerful sympathy with his species and from a temper, which led him to believe that the very reputation of excellence should walk among mankind unquestioned and unassailed."

Protests against this condition of affairs were not wanting, it is true, but they did not influence men to any great extent. Cowper, for example, criticizes most severely the luxury and vices of his age.

> Rank abundance breeds
> In gross and pampered cities, sloth and lust
> And wantonness and gluttonous excess.

He deplores the corruption in church and state, and pleads for a return to religion. In the *Progress of Error* he pictures Occidius as

> A cassock'd huntsman and a fiddling priest,
> Himself a wanderer from the narrow way,
> His silly sheep, what wonder if they stray.

Although he lashes the follies of his time in *The Task, Table Talk,* and *Expostulation,* still he does not attack the institutions of his country with the vehemence characteristic of later

writers. His poems are a mild expression of the revolutionary spirit that was then gathering strength.

At a very early age Shelley showed signs of hatred for existing institutions. These became more pronounced as he grew older, until they finally blazed forth in *Queen Mab* in 1813. This poem is considered by some to be merely a declamatory pamphlet in verse. Shelley himself described it at one time as "villainous trash." Like a true radical he gathers up all the evils of society, its crimes, misery, and oppression, and feels them so keenly that he makes them part of his own being. This collected lightning he discharged in one awful flash in *Queen Mab*.

The first two parts of this poem bear a striking resemblance to Volney's *Les Ruines*.[24] In *Queen Mab* a fairy descends and takes up Ianthe's soul to heaven that she may see how to accomplish the great end for which she lives, and that she may taste that peace which in the end all life will share. Ianthe merited this boon because she vanquished earth's pride and meanness and burst "the icy chains of custom." Volney's traveler is likewise disengaged from his body and conveyed to the upper regions by a Genius. Many consolations await him there as a reward for his unselfishness and desires for the happiness of mankind. The earth is plainly visible to both Volney's traveler and Shelley's spirit, Ianthe, and its thronging thousands seem like an ant-hill's citizens. Volney's traveler sees but a few remains of the hundred cities which once flourished in Syria. All this destruction was caused by cupidity. In the same way the Spirit of Ianthe finds that from England's fertile fields to the burning plains where Libyan monsters dwell—

> Thou canst not find one spot
> Whereon no city stood.—*Canto II.*

Ianthe thanks the fairy for this vision of the past and says that from it she will glean a warning for the future

[24] Cf. Hancock, *French Revolution and English Poets*, p. 56.

So that man
May profit by his errors and derive
Experience from his folly.

Volney's traveler wonders that past experience has not taught mankind a lesson, and that destruction is not a thing of the past. The Spirit, in *Queen Mab*, is shown the miserable life that kings live. They have no peace of mind; even their "slumbers are but varied agonies." They are heartless wretches whose ears are deaf to the shrieks of penury. The fairy says that kings and parasites arose—

From vice, black loathsome vice:
From rapine, madness, treachery, and wrong.

This is somewhat stronger than Volney's dictum that paternal tyranny laid the foundations of political despotism. Canto IV of *Queen Mab* contains a description of the horrors of war. In *Les Ruines* there is an account of the war between Russia and Turkey. Both attribute this horrible evil to cupidity, "the daughter and companion of ignorance." Volney's traveler is then vouchsafed a glimpse of the "new age" when Equality, Liberty, and Justice will reign supreme. The final chapters of *Les Ruines* describe a disputation between the doctors of different religions, which ends in convincing the people that all religions are false. The ministers of the various sects contradict and refute one another, opposing revelations to revelations and miracles to miracles, until they render it evident that they are all deceived or deceivers. Man himself is to blame for having been duped. Religion exists because man is superstitious and tolerates the imposition of priests. "Thus, agitated by their own passions, men, whether in their individual capacity, or as collective bodies, always rapacious and improvident passing from tyranny to slavery, from pride to abjectness, from presumption to despair, have been themselves the eternal instruments of their misfortunes."[25] In

[25]Chapter XI. p. 66.

the notes to *Queen Mab*, Shelley says that as ignorance of nature gave birth to gods the knowledge of nature is calculated to destroy them.

> But now contempt is mocking thy gray hairs;
> Thou art descending to the darksome grave
> Unhonored and unpitied, but by those
> Whose pride is passing by like thine,
> And sheds like thine a glare that fades before the sun
> Of Truth, and shines but in the dreadful night
> That long has lowered above the ruined world.[26]

The third part of *Queen Mab* contains a glowing picture of the Golden Age—of the world as it will be, when reason will be the sole guide of men. For this Shelley is indebted mainly to Godwin's *Political Justice*.

For his denunciation of the professions Shelley is indebted to the Essay on "Trades and Professions" in Godwin's *Enquirer*. With regard to commerce, Godwin says that the introduction of barter and sale into society was followed by vice and misery. "Barter and sale being once introduced, the invention of a circulating medium in the precious metals gave solidity to the evil, and afforded a field upon which for the rapacity and selfishness of man to develop all their refinements."[27] Shelley says:

> Commerce has set the mark of selfishness
> The signet of its all-enslaving power
> Upon a shining ore, and called it gold.[28]

Godwin expresses his opinion of merchants as follows: "There is no being on the face of the earth with a heart more thoroughly purged from every remnant of the weakness of benevolence and sympathy."[27]

And Shelley writes:

> Commerce! beneath whose poison-breathing shade
> No solitary virtue dares to spring.

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[26] Canto VI. p. 23.
[27] *The Enquirer*, p. 174.
[28] *Queen Mab.*

Shelley says that soldiers—

> . . . are the hired bravos who defend
> The tyrant's throne—the bullies of his fear:
> These are the sinks and channels of worst vice,
> The refuse of society, the dregs
> Of all that is most vile, etc.

His note on this passage was taken bodily from Essay V of Godwin's *Enquirer*. With regard to clergymen, Shelley expresses his opinion thus:

> Then grave and hoary-headed hypocrites
> Without a hope, a passion, or a love
> Who, through a life of luxury and lies
> Have crept by flattery to the seats of power
> Support the system whence their honors flow.

Godwin's verdict is not so severe. "Clergymen," he says, "are timid in enquiry, prejudiced in opinion, cold, formal, the slave of what other men may think of them, rude, dictatorial, impatient of contradiction, harsh in their censures, and illiberal in their judgments.

Queen Mab then is a fierce diatribe against existing institutions. It contains very little constructive philosophy. What value has it for mankind? Does it serve any purpose apart from giving pleasure to the aesthetic faculties? It assuredly does. It awakens the social conscience. The first step for the sinner on the road to conversion is to try to realize the sinful state of his soul. The same is true of a nation in need of reform. Unless its shortcomings are vividly brought home to it, reformation will never take place. To do this was and still is the work of *Queen Mab*. It laid bare the weaknesses of State and Church; it engendered the spirit of compassion and thus paved the way for reform.

CHAPTER II

VIEWS ON MARRIAGE AND LOVE

In September, 1813, Shelley wrote a sonnet, already quoted, to Ianthe, his first child, in which he says that the babe was dear to him not only for its own sweet sake, but for the mother's, and that the mother had grown dearer to him for the babe's. Hogg informs us, however, that about this time the ardor of Shelley's affection for his wife was beginning to cool. It is scarcely correct to speak of the ardor of his affection, for it may be doubted that he ever loved Harriet very ardently. If he had been seriously in love with his wife, he would not have written Miss Hitchener two months after his marriage that he loved her "more than any relation," and that she was the sister of his soul.[30] However this may be, it is certain that in 1814 Shelley and his wife did not get along well together. Harriet was beautiful and amiable, and adopted in a somewhat parrot-like manner the views of her husband. As she grew older she no doubt developed tastes more in keeping with the conventions of that society which Shelley detested. Professor Dowden suggests that motherhood produced in her character a change that did not harmonize with her husband's idealism. She was no longer an ardent schoolgirl, but a woman who has found out that one must grapple with the realities of life in some way more practical than the one hitherto followed. Her sister urged her to look for the style and elegance suitable to the wife of a prospective baronet. This was repugnant to Shelley's republican simplicity. "I have often thought," Peacock writes, "that, if Harriet had nursed her own child, and if the sister had not lived with them, the link of their married life would not have been so readily broken." Harriet sympathized less and less with her husband's aspirations, and as a consequence Shelley turned

[30] Letter, Oct. 10, 1811. *Ingpen*, p. 142.

to other women for the encouragement and inspiration which he once got from his wife. He spent too much of his time in the company of the Newtons, Boinvilles, and Turners to render possible the retention of his wife's affections. On March 16, 1814, Shelley wrote a letter to Hogg, which plainly shows that he found no happiness in his home. "I have been staying with Mrs. Boinville for the last month; I have escaped, in the society of all that friendship and philosophy combine, from the dismaying solitude of myself. . . . I have sunk into a premature old age of exhaustion . . . Eliza is still with us—not here!—but (with his wife) . . . I certainly hate her with all my heart and soul." Shelley's second marriage in St. George's Church, on March 22, does not throw any light on the relations that existed between himself and his wife. They celebrated this second ceremony simply to dispel all doubts concerning the validity of the first one in Edinburgh. On April 18, Mrs. Boinville wrote to Hogg that Shelley was at her house, that Harriet had gone to town (presumably to her father's), and that Eliza was living at Southampton. J. C. Jeafferson says that it was Shelley who deserted Harriet and not Harriet, Shelley. According to this biographer, Shelley left her at Binfield on May 18, 1814.[31] Shelley still hoped to regain his wife's love, and in some verses inscribed, "To Harriet, 1814," he appeals pathetically for her affection. Harriet had become cold and proud, and refused to meet his advances toward a reconciliation. Her pride, Shelley believed, was incompatible with virtue. When he found that he had "clasped a shadow," his anguish, owing to his great sensitiveness, was extreme. Other men put up with their wives' imperfections, and why could not Shelley have done the same? It must be remembered, though, that these men have other interests to occupy their thoughts, and other friends to give them the sympathy and love denied them at home. This was not the case with Shelley. He had few friends and many enemies.

[31] *The Real Shelley*, Vol. II, p. 217.

It should not surprise us then to find him snatching at the first vision "which promised him the longed-for boon of human love." This vision appeared to him in the person of Mary Godwin.

A letter from Harriet to Hookham, dated July 7, shows that she was anxious to be with her husband again. But the time for reconciliation had passed. Whenever Shelley hated or loved anybody, he did so intensely. Everybody was either an angel or a devil; and Harriet had ceased to be an angel. "Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds." Dowden says Shelley persuaded himself that Harriet was false to him and had given her heart to a Mr. Ryan. There is no ground for the charge of unfaithfulness, as Peacock, Thornton Hunt, and Trelawny bear testimony concerning her innocence.

Shelley believed that Harriet had ceased to love him, and that he was consequently free to contract a union with another. He puts forth this doctrine in the notes to *Queen Mab*. "A husband and wife ought to continue so long united as they love each other. . . . There is nothing immoral in this separation. . . . The conviction that wedlock is indissoluble holds out the strongest of all temptations to the perverse. . . . Prostitution is the legitimate offspring of marriage." He considered marriage a useless institution, and expressed this view in *St. Irvyne*. "Say, Eloise, do not you think it an insult to two souls, united to each other in the irrefragable covenants of love and congeniality, to promise in the sight of a Being whom they know not, that fidelity which is certain otherwise." He does not think that promiscuous intercourse will follow the abolition of marriage. Love, and not money, honors, or convenience will be the bond of these unions when marriage is abolished, and this will result in more faithfulness than obtains at present. "The parties having acted upon selection are not likely to forget this selection when the interview is over."[32] In his review of Hogg's *Memoirs of Prince*

[32]Quoted in *Shelley und die frauen*, Maurer.

Alexy Haimatoff, Shelley regards with horror the recommendation of the tutor to Alexy to indulge in promiscuous intercourse. "It is our duty to protest against so pernicious and disgusting an opinion." In a letter to Hogg, written after the latter's attempt to seduce Harriet, we find the following: "But do not love one (Harriet) who can not return it, who if she could, ought to stiffle her desire to do so. Love is not a whirlwind that is unvanquishable."

Shelley's views on marriage agree with those of Godwin. They both looked on marriage as a human institution, and consequently thought it might be modified or abolished entirely. They considered happiness man's highest good, and unhappiness man's only evil. Vows and promises are immoral because the thing promised may prove at any time detrimental to one's happiness. For this reason husband and wife should not bind themselves to live always together. This doctrine appealed to Shelley because it agreed with his views on freedom and his passion for opposing the traditions of society.

Heretofore it has been found convenient to lay the blame for all the radical views of Shelley at the door of Godwin. In the case of those on marriage a good deal of the blame must be borne by Sir James Lawrence.

In a letter to Lawrence, dated August 17, 1812, Shelley writes: "Your *Empire of the Naires*, which I read this spring, succeeded in making me a perfect convert to its doctrines. I then retained no doubts of the evils of marriage—Mrs. Wollstonecraft reasons too well for that—but I had been dull enough not to perceive the greatest argument against it, until developed in the Naires, prostitution both legal and illegal." Hogg says that Shelley and his young friends read Lawrence's tale with delight.[33] This work, intended to vindicate the rights of women, is a plea for free love. It pictures the Kingdom of the Naires as a Paradise of Love, where neither jealousy nor envy, quarreling nor hatred, have any place. Infanticide and the sufferings that follow in the wake of illicit inter-

course are there unknown. "It would be unjust to conclude," Lawrence writes, "that every voluntary union would be short-lived." He claims that, although constancy is no merit in itself, still it obtains in the Kingdom of the Naires to a greater extent than in Europe. "Know ye not that though constancy is no merit it is a source of happiness; and that though inconstancy is no crime, it is no blessing much less a boast."[34] There is some resemblance between this and the following from Shelley's *Notes to Queen Mab:* "Constancy has nothing virtuous in itself independently of the pleasure it confers, and partakes of the temporizing spirit of vice in proportion as it endures tamely moral defects of magnitude in the object of its indiscreet choice." In another place Lawrence writes: "Two hearts whom love with its loadstone has touched, will stick together, nought will tear asunder. But soon as the magnetic power has ceased, say, why should wedlock link in iron fetters, superfluous even when they are not vexatious, those bodies which the soul of love has left?"[35] In the notes to *Queen Mab* we read—"A husband and wife ought to continue so long united as they love each other; any law which should bind them to cohabitation for one moment after the decay of their affection would be a most intolerable tyranny, and the most unworthy of toleration."[36] "Among the Naires there are neither courtesans nor virgins, for the two extremes are equally unnatural and equally detrimental to the state. Love there shuns not the light of the sun, nor is it, as in Europe, degraded as a vice, nor allied to infamy and guilt."

Shelley lived at a time when the marriage ideal was not held in high repute. Lawrence describes many kinds of abominable travesties of marriage. In Persia, to silence the scruples of the lustful, "they have contrived contracts of enjoyment (for

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[33] *Hogg's Life*, p. 447.
[34] *The Naires*, book 8, p. 130.
[35] Book VI, p. 239.
[36] P. 797.

it would be wicked to call them contracts of marriage) for very short periods of time; these are formally signed and countersigned, and many priests gain their livelihood by giving their benediction to this orthodox prostitution."[37] Marriage was a mere formality for a great many. In France, Montesquieu writes, "a husband, who would wish to keep his wife to himself, would be considered a disturber of the public happiness, and as a madman who would monopolise the light of the sun. He who loves his own wife, is one who is not agreeable enough to gain the affections of any other man's wife, who takes advantage of a law to make amends for his own want of amiability; and who contributes, as far as lies in his power, to overturn a tacit convention, that is conducive to the happiness of both sexes."[38] In England conditions were no better. A husband might consort with as many women as he chose and his wife could get no redress. In Italy and Spain, the inhabitants, "too fond of liberty to respect the duties of marriage and too attached to their names to suffer their extinction, require only representatives, and not sons as their heirs. It is a pity that the Naire system is not known to them; but cicesbeism is a palliative to marriage and an ingenious compromise between family pride and natural independence, and it is better to be inconsistent and happy than unhappy and rational."[39]

In no country of Europe is the marriage vow kept. Why not then, argued Shelley, abolish this institution which makes hypocrites of men? "Marriage is the tomb of love. . . . Two lovers only meet when in good humor, or when resolved to be so; a married couple think themselves entitled to torment each other with their ill-humors. When a lover presents a trifle to his beloved, she receives it with smiles; when a husband makes a present to his wife, which indeed happens sel-

[37] Book XI cf. *Chardius Travels in Persia.*
[38] *Persian Letters.* Letter 55.
[39] *Naires,* Book X, p. 65.

dom enough, he runs the risk of being told that he has no taste, or that she could have bought it cheaper."[40]

The *Empire of the Naires* is not so much an exposition of the free-love system of the Naires as a grossly distorted and exaggerated picture of the miseries that follow from the present system of regulating the relations between the sexes in the different countries of the world. Lawrence draws horrible pictures of misery, degradation, and even murder that are a consequence of our opinions on love and marriage. "Whenever women are treated like slaves," he writes, "they act like slaves with artifice and hypocricy."[41] Shelley affirms that "the present system of constraint does no more, in the majority of instances, than make hypocrites of open enemies."[42]

Lawrence attributes the social evil to the existing code of morality. If a girl falls, she is driven from her home, and the only road then open to her is that which leads to the brothel. "Prostitution," says Shelley, "is the legitimate offspring of marriage and its accompanying errors. Women for no other crime than having followed the dictates of a natural appetite are driven with fury from the comforts and sympathies of society. Society avenges herself on the criminals of her own creation."[43]

It does not seem that Shelley made much use of the plot or rather of the different incidents of the *Empire of the Naires*. However, it may not be amiss to indicate the slight resemblance that exists between the story of Margaret Montgomery and that of Rosalind in *Rosalind and Helen*.

Rosalind loves a young man whom she is about to marry. On the day fixed for the wedding, her father returns from a distant land to die, and informs them that Rosalind and her lover are brother and sister.

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[40]Book X, p. 86.
[41]*The Naires*, Book VIII, p. 108.
[42]*Notes to Queen Mab.*
[43]*Notes to Queen Mab.*

Hold, hold!
He cried! I tell thee 'tis her brother!
Thy mother, boy, beneath the sod
Of yon churchyard rests in her shroud so cold;
I am now weak and pale, and old:
We were once dear to one another,
I and that corpse! Thou art our child!

Her betrothed falls dead on the receipt of this news. Rosalind marries another who uses her very cruelly, perhaps because she gives birth to an illegitimate child. Her husband dies, and his will, because she was adulterous,

Imported, that if e'er again
I sought my children to behold

Or in my birthplace did remain
Beyond three days, whose hours were told,
They should inherit naught:

In *The Naires* Margaret Montgomery and James Forbes had known and loved each other from childhood. Shortly before the time set for their wedding, James' father sent a letter to Margaret's father breaking off the marriage in the most positive terms. The latter's pride was inflamed, and a quarrel ensued in which Forbes was mortally wounded. The dying man sent for Margaret and told her that she and her lover are sister and brother, that he and not Montgomery was her father, and hence her mother's and his opposition to the marriage. Margaret is enceinte, and her reputed father turns her out of doors. Her lover is killed in Naples. A friend sends Margaret some money during her stay in London. Shelley makes Rosalind, who has been dispossessed too, receive some money from an old servant.

Rosalind and Margaret are separated from their life-long friends who know—

What to the evil world is due
And therefore sternly did refuse

to link themselves with the infamy of ones so lost as their

sinning sisters. In both cases common misery reunites them and their friends again.

In May or June, 1814, Shelley became acquainted with Mary Godwin. Her father described her as being "singularly bold, somewhat imperious, and active in mind; her desire of knowledge is great, and her perseverance in everything she undertakes almost invincible." She was brought up in an atmosphere of free thought, having spent most of her girlhood with Mr. Baxter, a faithful disciple of Godwin. Shelley and Mary had many sympathies in common, and it is not surprising to find them soon falling in love with each other.

Peacock tells us that Shelley at this time was in agony. On the one hand he was tormented by his desire to treat Harriet rightly, and on the other by his passion for Mary. Passion won the day, and on July 28 Shelley eloped with Mary to the Continent. He tried to ease his conscience by offering Harriet his friendship and protection. He wrote her from the Continent and urged her to join himself and Mary in Switzerland. He assured her that she would find in him a firm, constant friend to whom her interests would be always dear.

While passing judgment on Shelley one should not forget that he simply put into practice those doctrines which he believed to be true. Neither Shelley nor Mary thought they were inflicting any wrong on Harriet as long as they offered her their friendship and protection.

In September, 1814, Shelley, Mary and Jane Clairmont, Mary's half-sister, settled in London. About this time he was troubled a great deal with money embarrassments and was in continual hiding from the bailiffs. Toward the end of the year he read "the tale of Godwin's American disciple in romance, Charles Brockden Brown."[44] "Brown's four novels," says Peacock, "Schiller's Robbers, and Goethe's Faust, were of all the works with which he was familiar those which took the deepest root in Shelley's mind and had the strongest influence in the formation of his character."

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[44]Dowden: *Life of Shelley*, Vol. I, p. 472.

Brown's most important novel, *Wieland,* is a gruesome tale in which the horrors portrayed owe their existence to the errors of the sufferers. Wieland, a very religious man, is deceived by an unscrupulous ventriloquist who persuades him that a voice from heaven bids him sacrifice the life of his wife and four children. "If Wieland had framed juster notions of moral duty, and of the divine attributes; or if he had been gifted with ordinary equanimity or foresight, the double tongued deceiver would have been baffled and repelled." This is the doctrine of Shelley; he believed that the evils of society were man's own creation.

> Ye princes of the earth, ye sit aghast
> Amid the ruin which yourselves have made,
> Yes, Desolation heard your trumpet's blast,
> And sprang from sleep.[45]

Brown's views on love are almost as radical as those of Godwin. Wieland's sister is in love with Pleyel, and is anxious to act in such a way as to give him hope and at the same time not to appear too forward. "Time was," she says, "when these emotions would be hidden with immeasurable solicitude from every human eye. Alas! these airy and fleeting impulses of shame are gone. My scruples were preposterous and criminal. They are bred in all hearts, by a perverse and vicious education, and they would have maintained their place in my heart had not my portion been set in misery. My errors have taught me thus much wisdom; that those sentiments which we ought not to disclose it is criminal to harbor."[46] Shelley's ideal woman would hold the same views. He writes:

> And women too, frank, beautiful and kind . . .
> . . . From custom's evil taint exempt and pure
> Speaking the wisdom once they could not think,
> Looking emotions once they feared to feel,
> And changed to all which once they dared not be
> Yet, being now, made earth like heaven.

[45] *The Revolt of Islam,* Canto XI, st. 15.
[46] Page 74.

In May, 1816, Shelley, accompanied by Mary and Jane Clairmont, started for Italy. It is probable that the undesirable state of Shelley's health, together with the constant begging of Godwin, determined them to leave England. J. C. Jeafferson maintains that Miss Clairmont persuaded Shelley to accompany her to Geneva, where she was to meet Lord Byron. It is quite certain though that Mary and Shelley were ignorant of Byron's intrigue with Miss Clairmont. The most that can be said is that Jane's solicitations may have hastened their departure.

In September, 1816, the Shelleys returned to London. About a month afterwards news reached them that Fanny Imlay (Mary's half-sister) had committed suicide. It is said that love for Shelley drove her to despair. In December Shelley was seeking for Harriet, of whom he had lost trace some time previously. On December 10, her body was found in the Serpentine. Very little is known of the life she led after her separation from Shelley. Rumor had it that she drank heavily and became the mistress of a soldier, who deserted her.

It may be that "in all Shelley did, he, at the time of doing it, believed himself justified to his own conscience," but surely that conscience is warped which finds no cause for remorse in Shelley's treatment of his first wife. No one can view his self-complacency and assumption of righteousness at this time without feelings of detestation. On the day he heard the news of his wife's suicide he wrote to Mary: "Everything tends to prove, however, that beyond the shock of so hideous a catastrophe having fallen on a human being once so nearly connected with me, there would in any case, have been little to regret." "Little to regret" save the shock to his nerves. What about the suffering of the poor woman that forced her to commit such a terrible deed?

Shelley claimed his children from the Westbrooks, but the claim was denied. The children were committed to the care of a Dr. Hume, of Hanwell. Lord Eldon gave his judgment

against Shelley on the ground that Shelley's opinions led to immoral conduct. Shelley gave vent to his rage in sixteen vitriolic stanzas, which he addressed to the Lord Chancellor.

During his residence at Marlow on the Thames in 1817, Shelley wrote *The Revolt of Islam,* which was first published under the title *Laon and Cythna.* In its first form it contained violent attacks on theism and Christianity; and the hero and heroine were brother and sister. Ollier refused to publish it unless everything indicating such a relationship were removed, and Shelley reluctantly consented to make the necessary alterations.

The Revolt of Islam opens with an allegorical myth in which the strife between a serpent and an eagle—good and evil—is described. While the poet sympathizes with the snake, a mysterious woman (Asia in Prometheus Unbound) suddenly appears and conducts him to heaven. There he meets Laon and Cythna who recount the sufferings which made them worthy of this heavenly place. First of all, Laon tells about his love for Cythna, who is described as a shape of brightness moving upon the earth. She mourned with him over the servitude—

> In which the half of humankind were mewed,
> Victims of lust and hate, the slaves of slaves,
> She mourned that grace and power were thrown as food
> To the hyena lust, who, among graves,
> Over his loathed meal, laughing in agony raves.[47]

Cythna determines to make all good and just. By the force of kindness she will "disenchant the captives," and "then millions of slaves shall leap in joy as the benumbing cramp of ages shall leave their limbs." The happiness of the lovers was rudely interrupted. Cythna is taken away by the emissaries of the tyrant Othman; and Laon, who killed three of the king's slaves while defending her, is cast into prison. A hermit sets him

[47] Canto II, st. 36.

free, conveys him to an island, and supports him there for seven years. During all of this time Laon's mind is deranged. He recovers, however, and then they both embark to help overthrow the tyrant Othman. The revolutionists are successful principally because of the influence of their leader, who is a woman, Laone. Such is the strength of her quiet words that none dare harm her. Tyrants send their armed slaves to quell—

> Her power, they, even like a thundergust
> Caught by some forest, bend beneath the spell
> Of that young maiden's speech, and to their chiefs rebel.[48]

Some of the revolutionists demand that Othman be put to death for his crimes. Laon interposes and tells them that if their hearts are tried in the true love of freedom they should cease to dread this one poor lonely man. Here is Godwin's doctrine again:

> The chastened will
> Of virtue sees that justice is the light
> Of love, and not revenge and terror and despite.[49]

That same night the tyrant with the aid of a foreign army treacherously attacks the revolutionists. In the midst of the carnage

> A black Tartarian horse of giant frame
> Comes trampling o'er the dead; the living bleed
> Beneath the hoofs of that tremendous steed
> On which like to an angel robed in white
> Sate one waving a sword.[50]

Needless to say, this is Cythna who comes to rescue Laon. They both flee to a lonely ruin where they recount to each other the stories of their sufferings. Cythna tells that she was carried to a submarine cavern by order of the tyrant, and that she was fed there by an eagle. She became a mother, and was

[48] Canto IV, st. 20.
[49] Canto IV, st. 34.
[50] Canto VI, st. 19.

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comforted for a while by the caresses of her child until it mysteriously disappeared. An earthquake changed the position of the cavern, and Cythna is rescued by some passing sailors. She is taken to the city of Othman, where she leads the revolutionists as described in the previous cantos. Want and pestilence follow in the wake of massacre, and cause awful misery. An Iberian priest in whose breast "hate and guile lie watchful" says that God will not stay the plague until a pyre is built and Laon and Cythna burned upon it. An immense reward is offered for their capture. The person who brings them both alive shall espouse the princess and reign with the king. A stranger comes to the tyrant's court and tells them that they themselves have made all the desolation which they bewail. However, he cannot expect them to change their ways so he promises to betray Laon if they will only allow Cythna to go to America. The tyrant agrees to the stranger's terms, who then tells them that he is Laon himself. He is placed upon the altar, and as the torches are about to be applied to it Cythna appears on her Tartarian steed. The priest urges his comrades to seize her, but the king has scruples about breaking his promise. She is set on the pyre, however, and both perish in the flames. They wake reclining—

> On the waved and golden sand
> Of a clear pool, upon a bank o'ertwined
> With strange and star-bright flowers, which to the wind
> Breathed divine odour.[51]

A boat approaches them with an angel (Cythna's child) in it. They are all carried in this "curved shell of hollow pearl" to a haven of rest and joy.

This disconnected story serves as a vehicle to convey exhortations regarding liberty and justice. Thus, during the voyage from the cavern to Othman's city, Cythna delivers an address to the sailors which contains some of the best passages in the poem. She tells them for example:

[51] Canto XII, 18.

To feel the peace of self-contentment's lot,
To own all sympathies, and outrage none,
And in the inmost bowers of sense and thought,
Until life's sunny day is quite gone down,
To sit and smile with Joy, or, not alone
To kiss salt tears from the worn cheek of woe;
To live as if to love and live were one;
This is not faith or law, nor those who bow
To thrones on Heaven or Earth such destiny may know.[52]

The poem aims at kindling a virtuous enthusiasm for the doctrines of liberty and equal rights to all. "It is a series of pictures illustrating the growth and progress of individual mind aspiring after excellence" and the regeneration of humanity. Laon is the expression of ideal devotion to the happiness of mankind; and Cythna is a type of the new woman, "the free, equal, fearless companion of man." The poem depicts "the awakening of an immense nation from their slavery and degradation to a true sense of moral dignity and freedom; the tranquillity of successful patriotism and the universal toleration and benevolence of true philanthropy." It concludes by showing that the triumph of oppression is temporary and a sure pledge of its inevitable fall.

So much attention is here given to *The Revolt of Islam* because of the influence on it of a love story—*The Missionary,* by Miss Owenson—an influence which up to the present has escaped the notice of Shelley students.[53] In a letter to Hogg, dated June 27, 1811, Shelley writes "the only thing that has interested me, if I except your letters, has been one novel. It is Miss Owenson's *Missionary,* an Indian tale; will you read it?

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[52]Canto VIII, st. 12.

[53]"Toutes les sources de "Laon and Cythna" n'ont pas ete explorées: celles qui l'ont ete paraissent peu sûres et peu importantes: la fête de la Fédération du V e chant rappelle son modèle francais, et l'ideale peinture des Ruines de Volney; la grotte on Cythna est enchaînée—comme la caverne d'Asia dans Prométhée peut être due à un souvenir de The Cave of Fancy de Mary Wollstonecraft; lés echos de Byron, et certains prétendent de l'Imagination de notre Delille semblent peu discernables."—Koszul, *La Jeunesse de Shelley,* 1910, p. 366.

It is really a divine thing; Luxima, the Indian, is an angel. What a pity we cannot incorporate these creatures of fancy; the very thoughts of them thrill the soul! Since I have read this book, I have read no other."[54] This tale is a very striking one, and it is not strange that Shelley made its philosophy his own. The descriptions are so vivid, the tale so simple, and the experiences recorded apparently so true, that it takes a maturer mind than Shelley's to lay bare the fallacies of the work and to unmask its half truths. No outline of the story can give an idea of its strength. In the beginning of the seventeenth century Hilarion Count d'Acugna of the royal house of Braganza joins the Franciscans, and on account of his zeal and piety is known as "the man without a fault." He is full of zeal for the salvation of souls and goes to India to convert pagans to Christianity. "Devoted to a higher communion his soul only stooped from heaven to earth, to relieve the sufferings he pitied, or to correct the errors he condemned; to substitute peace for animosity . . . to watch, to pray, to fast, to suffer for all. Such was the occupation of a life, active as it was sinless." Passages like the above serve as sugar coating for the following: "Hitherto the life of the young monk resembled the pure and holy dream of saintly slumbers, for it was still a dream; splendid indeed, but unsubstantial, dead to all those ties which constitute at once the charm and the anxiety of existence, which agitate while they bless the life of man, the spring of human affection lay untouched within his bosom and the faculty of human reason unused within his mind. . . . Yet these feelings though unexercised were not extinct; they betrayed their existence even in the torpid life he had chosen, etc." The missionary spends some time at Lahore studying the dialects of Upper India under the tutelage of a Pundit. During his stay there the Guru of Cashmere comes to Lahore for the ceremony of Upaseyda. He is ac-

[54] Hogg's *Life of Shelley*, ed. 1906, p. 233.

companied by his beautiful and accomplished granddaughter, Luxima, the Prophetess and Brachmachira of Cashmere.

The Pundit tells the missionary about the wonderful influence that the Guru's granddaughter, Luxima, has over the people of the place, just as the old man of *The Revolt of Islam*, who represents Shelley's teacher, Dr. Lind, tells Laon about the extraordinary influence of Cythna on the people she meets. "The Indians of the most distinguished rank drew back as she approached lest their very breath should pollute that region of purity her respiration consecrated, and the odour of the sacred flowers, by which she was adorned, was inhaled with an eager devotion, as if it purified the soul it almost seemed to penetrate." The Pundit says that "her beauty, her enthusiasm, her graces, and her genius, alike capacitate her to propagate and support the errors of which she herself is the victim." The old man tells Laon that Cythna—

> Paves her path with human hearts, and o'er it flings
> The wildering gloom of her immeasurable wings.

At the ceremony of Upaseyda, which the Guru holds, disputants of various sects put forth the claims of their respective religions. "A devotee of the Musuavi sect took the lead; he praised the mysteries of the Bhagavat, and explained the profound allegory of the six Ragas. . . . A disciple of the Vedanti school spoke of the transports of mystic love, and maintained the existence of spirit only; while a follower of Buddha supported the doctrine of matter, etc." The missionary takes advantage of this opportunity to tell them about Christianity. "The impression of his appearance was decisive, it sank at once to the soul; and he imposed conviction on the senses, ere he made his claim on the understanding. . . . He ceased to speak and all was still as death. His hands were folded on his bosom, to which his crucifix was pressed; his eyes were cast in meekness on the earth; but the fire of his zeal still played like a ray from heaven on his brow." This reminds one at once of Canto IX, of *The Revolt of Islam*:

And Oromaze, Joshua, and Mahomet,
Moses and Buddah, Zerdhust and Brahm and Foh,
A tumult of strange names, which never met
Before, as watchwords of a single woe,
Arose; each raging votary 'gan to throw
Aloft his armed hands, and each did howl
"Our God alone is God!"—And slaughter now
Would have gone forth, when from beneath a cowl
A voice came forth, which pierced like ice through every soul.

'Twas an Iberian priest from whom it came
A zealous man, who led the legioned west,
With words which faith and pride had stopped in flame,
To quell the unbelievers . . .

He ceased, and they
A space stood silent, as far, far away
The echoes of his voice among them died;
And he knelt down upon the dust, alway
Muttering the curses of his speechless pride.

There is a striking resemblance between this cowled Iberian priest and the Iberian Franciscan of *The Missionary.*

The missionary looked to the conversion of the prophetess as the most effectual means of accomplishing the conversion of the nation. With this end in view he goes to Cashmere, and unexpectedly comes upon Luxima one morning, praying at a shrine. "Silently gazing in wonder upon each other, they stood finely opposed, the noblest specimens of the human species . . . ; she, like the East, lovely and luxuriant; he, like the West, lofty and commanding; the one, radiant in all the luster, attractive in all the softness which distinguishes her native regions; the other, towering in all the energy, which marks his ruder latitudes." They meet again and again, and the result is they fall in love with each other. It is significant from the point of view of the influence of the *Missionary* that in Alastor Shelley meets his ideal love "in the vale of Cashmire." The way the novelist develops the progress of this sentiment, which both the priest and the priestess had vowed to suppress, can sacrcely be surpassed. She describes how their new mode

of feeling was opposed by their ancient habits of thinking, and how their minds "struggling between a natural bliss and a religious principle of resistance, between a passionate sentiment and an habitual self-command, become a scene of conflict and agitation."

> Old age with its gray hair,
> And wrinkled legends of unworthy things
> And icy sneers is nought; it cannot dare
> To burst the chains which life forever flings
> On the entangled soul's aspiring wings.[55]

Luxima succumbed to the warfare. She overcame the traditions and laws by which she was bound; and hence Shelley's great admiration for her. She embraced Christianity less in faith than in love. She did not feel guilty because she thought her sentiments of love were true to all life's natural impulses. The missionary, on the other hand, must have excited in Shelley pity for the man and hatred for the institutions which stood in the way of their happiness. "He had not, indeed, relinquished a single principle of his moral feeling—he had not yet vanquished a single prejudice of his monastic education; to feel, was still with him to be weak; to love, a crime; and to resist, perfection." Luxima is excommunicated, deprived of caste and declared a wanderer and an outcast upon the earth. They both elude their pursuers and join a caravan which is on its way to Tatta. On their journey the missionary tells her that they must soon separate, as duty demands that he continue the work of his ministry. He will see to it that she is well cared for in a convent at Tatta. Luxima upbraids him for his selfishness. He replies that it is not the prospect of his degradation and humiliation which deters him from staying with her, but the thought that by so doing he will commit a crime—break his vows. "Pity then," the missionary says, "and yet respect him who, loving thee and virtue equally, can never know happiness without nor with thee—who thus con-

[55] *The Revolt*, Canto II, st. 33.

demned to suffer without ceasing submits not to his fate, but is overpowered by its tyranny, and who alike helpless and unresigned opposes while he suffers and repines while he endures." Continency was unintelligible to Shelley, and he criticizes it in Canto XII as follows:

> . . . that sudden rout
> One checked who never in his mildest dreams
> Felt awe from grace or loveliness, the seams
> Of his rent heart so hard and cold a creed
> Had seared with blistering ice; but he misdeems
> That he is wise whose wounds do only bleed
> Only for self; thus thought the Iberian priest indeed
>
> And others too thought he was wise to see
> In pain and fear and hate something divine;
> In love and beauty no divinity.

Shelley believed that "the worthiness of every action is to be estimated by the quantity of pleasurable sensation it is calculated to produce,"[56] that the ideal of man was to love and to be loved. Luxima says: "Be that heaven my witness that I would not for the happiness I have abandoned and the glory I have lost, resign that desert whose perilous solitudes I share with thee. Oh! my Father, and my friend, thou alone hast taught me to know that the paradise of woman is the creation of her heart; that it is not the light or air of heaven, though beaming brightness and breathing fragrance, nor all that is loveliest in Nature's scenes, which form the sphere of her existence and enjoyment! It is alone the presence of him she loves; it is that mysterious sentiment of the heart which diffuses a finer sense of life through the whole being; and which resembles, in its singleness and simplicity, the primordial idea which in the religion of my fathers is supposed to have preceded time and worlds, and from which all created good has emanated."[57]

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[56] *Notes to Queen Mab.*
[57] P. 210.

In the preface to *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley writes that he "sought to enlist the harmony of metrical language . . . and the rapid and subtle transitions of human passion in the cause of a liberal and comprehensive morality." For this purpose he chose "a story of human passion in its most universal character, diversified with moving and romantic adventures and appeal, in contempt of all artificial opinions or institutions to the common sympathies of every human breast. What is the *Missionary* but "a story of human passion appealing in contempt of all artificial opinions or institutions to the common sympathies of every human heart?" When *The Revolt of Islam* first appeared, Laon and Cythna were brother and sister. Their love like that of the missionary and priestess is considered illicit. Not only are the motifs of both very similar, but many of the incidents are identical. The influence of the *Missionary* on the *Revolt* will perhaps appear more clearly if we put these incidents in parallel columns. In the second canto—

Laon and Cythna must part that they may spread their doctrines among men.

Cythna says:

"We part! O Laon, I must dare, nor tremble
To meet those looks no more!
Oh heavy stroke
Sweet brother of my soul! can I dissemble
The agony of this thought?"

Laon and Cythna are seized by the officers of the State, and during the struggle Laon overcomes three of the tyrant's soldiers in defense of Cythna.

"—a feeble shiek
It was a feeble shriek, faint, far, and low
Arrested me—my *mien grew calm and meek*—
'Twas Cythna's cry."

When the missionary tells Luxima that they must separate, in order that he may continue the work of his ministry, Luxima says she will not long endure the agony of separation. "Thinkest thou," she exclaims, "that I shall long survive his loss for whom I have sacrificed all?"

The missionary and Luxima are seized by the officers of the Inquisition, and the missionary overcomes three soldiers in defense of Luxima.

"But the *feeble* plaints of Luxima, who was borne away in the arms of one of the assailants *recalled to his bewildered mind* a consciousness of their mutual sufferings and situations."

After the overthrow of the tyrant Othman the people demand that he be put to death.

Laon answers:

"'What do ye seek? What fear ye,' then I cried,
Suddenly starting forth, 'that ye should shed
The blood of Othman? If your hearts are tried
In the true love of freedom cease to dread
This one poor lonely man.'"

From his prison Laon sees a ship sailing by in which he thinks Cythna is imprisoned.

"I knew that ship bore Cythna o'er the plain
Of waters, to her blighting slavery sold
And watched it with such thoughts as must remain untold."

Cythna is imprisoned in a cavern, and her mind is deranged for a time.

"The fiend of madness which had made its prey
Of my poor heart was lulled to sleep awhile."

The part taken by Laon and Cythna in the insurrection of the people has already been explained.

Laon and Cythna are condemned to death through the instigation of the priests.

The morning of Laon's execution has arrived.

Their fellow travelers boldly advanced to rescue the missionary and Luxima, and awaiting his orders, asked: "Shall we throw those men under the camels' feet or shall we bind them to those rocks and leave them to their fate?"

"The missionary cast on them a glance of pity and contempt and looking round him with an air at once dignified and grateful, he said: 'My friends, my heart is deeply touched by your generous sympathy; good and grave men ever unite, of whatever religion or whatever faith they may be; but I belong to a religion whose spirit is to save, not to destroy; suffer these men to live; they are but the agents of a higher power whose scrutiny they challenge me to meet.'"

On the way to Goa the missionary notices a covered conveyance going by in which he feels sure Luxima is imprisoned. "He shuddered and for a moment the heroism of virtue deserted him. He doubted not that she would be conveyed in the same vessel with him to Goa."

Luxima is imprisoned in a convent at Lahore. The exciting incidents of their arrest and separation had deranged her mind for a time.

The natives are on the point of rebelling, and Spanish authority in India is on the brink of extinction. The missionary is condemned to death, by the Inquisition. The morning of the missionary's execution has arrived.

"The secular judges had already taken their seats on the

"And see beneath a sun-bright *canopy*,
Upon a platform level with the pile,
The anxious Tyrant sit enthroned on high
Girt by the chieftans of the host.
. . . . .
There *was silence through the host* as when
An earthquake trampling on some populous town,
Has crusht ten thousand with one tread, and men
Expect the second.
. . . . .
Tumult was in the soul of all beside,
Ill joy, or doubt, or fear; but those who saw
Their tranquil victim pass felt wonder glide,
Into their brain, and became calm with awe."

As burning torches are about to be applied to the pyre on which Laon is to die, a steed bursts through the rank of the people on which a woman sits.

"Fairer, it seems than aught that *earth can breed*,
Calm, radiant, like a phantom of the dawn.
A spirit *from the caves* of *daylight* wandering gone.
All thought it was *God's Angel* come to sweep
The lingering guilty to their fiery grave.

platform, the Grand Inquisitor and the Viceroy had placed themselves beneath their respective *canopies*." The Christian missionary is led to the pile, "*the silence which belongs to death reigned* on *every* side; thousands of persons were present; . . . Nature was touched on the master spring of emotion, and betrayed in the looks of the multitude feelings of *horror*, of *pity*, and of admiration, which the bigoted vigilance of an inhuman zeal would in vain have sought to suppress.

On the day of the execution Luxima noticed a procession moving beneath her window and her eyes rested on the form of the missionary. "She beheld the friend of her soul; love and reason returned together." She escapes the vigilance of her guardian, and seeks the place where her beloved is to die. While officers were binding the missionary to the stake "a form *scarcely human* darting with the velocity of lightning through the multitude reached the foot of the pile and stood before it in a grand and aspiring attitude. . . . thus *bright and aerial* as it stood, it looked like a spirit *sent from heaven* in the awful moment of dissolution to cheer and to convey to the regions of the blessed, the soul which would soon arise pure from the ordeal of earthly sufferings. The sudden appearance of the singular phantom struck the imagination of the credulous and awed multitude with superstitious wonder. . . .

The Christians fixed their eyes upon the cross, which glittered on a bosom whose beauty scarcely seemed of mortal mould, and deemed themselves the witnesses of a miracle wrought for the salvation of a persecuted martyr, whose innocence was asserted by the firmness and fortitude with which he met a dreadful death."

Cythna has come not to save Laon but to die with him.

At the sight of Cythna

"They pause, they blush, they gaze—a gathering shout
Bursts like one sound from the ten thousand streams
Of a tempestuous sea."

(All through the poem Cythna exerts a wonderful influence over the people.)

"The tyrants send their armed slaves to quell
Her power; they, even like a thunder-gust
Caught by some forest, bend beneath the spell
Of that young maiden's speech, and to their chiefs rebel."

Luxima springs upon the pyre to die with the missionary.

At the sight of Luxima the people rise in rebellion.

"The timid spirits of the Hindus rallied to an event which touched their hearts, and roused them from the lethargy of despair—the sufferings, the oppression, they had so long endured, seemed now epitomized before their eyes in the person of their celebrated and distinguished prophetess . . . they fell with fury on the Christians, they rushed upon the cowardly guards of the Inquisition who let fall their arms and fled in dismay."

It did not suit Shelley's purpose to have the people use force against the tyrants, so he makes Cythna persuade the people

"—though unwilling her to bind
Near me among the snakes."

The officers of the Inquisition called on by their superiors sprang forward to seize the missionary; "for a moment the timid multitude were still as *the pause of a brooding storm*."

A priest commands the multitude to seize Cythna,

"Slaves to the stake
Bind her, and on my head the burden lay
Of her just torments . . .
They trembled, but replied not nor obeyed
Pausing in breathless silence.

Laon escaped from his first prison in a boat which belonged to an old man who represents Shelley's tutor at Eton, Dr. Lind.

During the confusion caused by the insurrection the missionary and Luxima escape in a boat which was provided by his old tutor, the Pundit.

The missionary and Luxima reach a cavern which bears a slight resemblance to the caverns of *The Revolt*. He discovers that the priestess is dying from a wound received during the melée at Lahore. "Answering the eloquence of her languid and tender looks, he exclaims, 'Yes, dearest, and most unfortunate our destines are now inseparably united! Together we have loved, together we have resisted, together we have erred, and together we have suffered; lost alike to the glory and the fame which our virtues and the conquest of our passions obtained for us; alike condemned by our religions and our countries, there now remains nothing on earth for us but each other.'" This recalls to mind the dedication of *The Revolt of Islam*—

> There is no danger to a man that knows
> What life and death is; there's not any law
> Exceeds his knowledge: neither is it lawful
> That he should stoop to any other law.

As the end of Luxima approaches she bids her beloved live and preach peace and mercy, and love to Brahmin and Christian. "But should thy eloquence and thy example fail, tell them my story! tell them how I have suffered, and how even thou has failed—thou, for whom I forfeited my caste, my country and my life; for 'tis too true, that still more loving than enlightened, my ancient habits of belief clung to my mind, thou to my heart; still I lived thy seeming proselyte, that I might still live thine; and now I die as Brahmin women die; a Hindoo in my feelings and my faith—dying for him I loved and believing as my fathers believed."[58]

This bears some resemblance to that part of Cythna's speech in the cavern, Canto IX, where she glories in the triumph of their love over the opposition of the world.

> I fear nor prize
> Aught that can now betide unshared by thee.

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[58]P. 273.

Cythna thinks that she *will soon die* and believes like Luxima that the story of their love will be a source of inspiration to mankind

> Our many thoughts and deeds, our life and love,
> Our happiness, and all that we have been
> Immortally must live and burn and move
> When we shall be no more.

There are, of course, some differences between the two stories, especially in the conclusions (Cythna and Laon are burned, while Luxima alone dies and the Missionary is never heard of again); but many of the incidents of both are so alike as to justify us in believing that those in *The Revolt* were derived from *The Missionary*. This is confirmed by the fact that Shelley makes more attacks in this poem on priests and the celibacy of the clergy than in any other. In the preface to the poem, Shelley says that "although the mere composition occupied no more than six months, the thoughts thus arranged were slowly gathered in as many years." It is suggestive that the idea of composing the poem came to him in 1811, the year in which he first read the *Missionary*. In this same year he wrote a little poem entitled an *Essay on Love*, no copy of which is now extant.[59] Should one ever come to light, it may show remarkable similarity to the love poem *The Revolt of Islam*, where "love is celebrated everywhere as the sole law which should govern the moral world."[60]

It has been said that Shelley was a libertine, but there seems to be no proof for this assertion. Hogg, who was his most intimate friend at Oxford, says the purity and sanctity of Shelley's life were most conspicuous. "He was offended, and indeed more indignant than would appear to be consistent with the singular mildness of his nature at a coarse and awkward jest, especially if it were immodest and uncleanly; in the latter case his anger was unbounded, and his uneasiness

[59]Cf. Letter to Godwin, Jan. 16, 1812.
[60]Preface to *The Revolt of Islam*.

preeminent." With the exception of his elopement with Mary Godwin there is nothing in his life to indicate that he was licentious. "Die ruhe, klarheit, sicherheit und stärke seines geschlechtlichen empfündens, das frei ist von aller lüsternheit oder unnatürlichkeit ist bei seiner feinfühligen, nervosen körperanlage besonders bemerkenswert."[61]

True, Shelley loved many women, but this does not prove that he was immoral. His love is platonic and not sensual. Platonic love is described by Howell as "a love abstracted from all corporeal gross impressions and sensual appetites, but consists in contemplations and ideas of the mind."[62] It is a passion having its source in the enjoyment of beauty and goodness.

"What is love or friendship?" Shelley asks. "Is it capable of no extension, no communication?" Lord Kaimes defines love to be a particularization of the general passion, but this is the love of sensation, of sentiment—the absurdest of absurd vanities; it is the love of pleasure, not the love of happiness. The one is a love which is self-centered, self-devoted, self-interested . . . selfishness, monopoly in its very soul; but love, the love which we worship—virtue, heaven, disinterestedness—in a word."[63] Love seeks the good of all, not because its object is a minister to its pleasures, but because it is really worthy.

Platonism, laying emphasis upon the function of the soul as opposed to the senses, treats "love as a purely spiritual passion devoid of all sensuous pleasure."[64] Beauty is a spiritual thing, the splendor of God's light shining in all things. It is that quality of an object which draws us to it and make us love it. Man should love everything and everybody because they are all beautiful. Shelley says:

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[61]Maurer: *Shelley und die frauen*, p. 74.
[62]Howell's Letters, Book I, sect. 6, let. XV.
[63]To E. Hitchener, Nov. 12, 1811.
[64]J. S. Harrison, *Platonism in English Poetry of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, p. 104.

> True love in this differs from gold and clay,
> That to divide is not to take away
> Love is like understanding, that grows bright
> Gazing on many truths;[65]

In another place he says "the meanest of our fellow beings contains qualities, which, developed, we must admire and adore." Beauty is something more than outward appearance. The source of its power lies in the soul. "The platonic theory of beauty teaches that the beauty of the body is a result of the formative energy of the soul." According to the Platonist Ficino the soul has descended from heaven and has framed a body in which to dwell. True lovers are those whose souls have departed from heaven under the same astral influences and who, accordingly, are informed with the same idea in imitation of which they frame their earthly bodies."[66] "We are born," writes Shelley, "into the world, and there is something within us which, from the instant that we live, more and more thirsts after its likeness . . . The discovery of its antitype; the meeting with an understanding capable of clearly estimating our own . . . with a frame whose nerves like the chords of two exquisite lyres, strung to the accompaniment of one delightful voice, vibrate with the vibrations of our own; . . . this is the invisible and unattainable point to which love tends."[67] According to Plato wisdom is the most lovely of all ideas and the human being who has the greatest amount of wisdom is the most lovable. Platonic love then concerns only the soul, and the union of lover and beloved is simply a union of their souls. "I am led to love a being," Shelley says, "not because it stands in the physical relation of blood to me but because I discern an intellectual relationship."[68] Whenever Shelley sees one possessing beauty and virtue he cannot help loving that person.

[65] *Epipsychidion*, Dowden, p, 408.
[66] *Platonism in English Poetry*, p. 115.
[67] *Essay on Love*.
[68] Letter to Miss Hitchener.

I never was attached to that great sect
Whose doctrine is that each one should select
Out of the crowd a mistress or a friend
And all the rest though fair and wise commend
To cold oblivion;[69]

Again

Narrow

The heart that loves, the brain that contemplates
The life that wears, the spirit that creates
One object, and one form, and builds thereby
A sepulchre for its eternity.

This is the doctrine of Diotima in Plato's *Symposium*, which Shelley has translated as follows: "He who aspires to love rightly, ought from his earliest youth to seek an intercourse with beautiful forms. . . . He ought then to consider that beauty in whatever form it resides is the brother of that beauty which subsists in another form; and if he ought to pursue that which is beautiful in form it would be absurd to imagine that beauty is not one and the same thing in all forms, and would therefore remit much of his ardent preferences towards one, through his perception of the multitude of claims upon his love."

In the preface to *Alastor* Shelley says that the poem represents a youth (himself) of uncorrupted feelings led forth to the contemplation of the universe. "But the period arrives when these objects cease to suffice. His mind is at length awakened, and thirsts for intercourse with an intelligence similar to himself. He images to himself the Being whom he loves." This image unites all of wonderful or wise or beautiful which the poet could depict. Shelley sought this ideal all through life, and when he thought he found it went into raptures. Disillusionment, however, soon followed, and *Alastor* is the expression of his despair at not finding an embodiment of his ideal.

[69] *Epipsychidion.*

If we keep in mind that Shelley was a platonist, we shall be able to form a more intelligent estimate of his love lyrics and his relations with women. In his first wife, Harriet, he saw courage, a desire for freedom, and a willingness to learn his doctrines.

> Thou art sincere and good, of resolute mind
> Free from heart-withering customs' cold control,
> Of passion lofty, pure and subdued.

As soon as she ceased to take interest in his studies, his love for her began to wane. "Every one must know," he tells Peacock, "that the partner of my life should be one who can feel poetry and understand philosophy." A month or two after his first marriage he tells Elizabeth Hitchener that he loves her. Seeing that she possessed high intelligence, great love of mankind, and a tendency to oppose existing institutions, he straightway calls her the "sister of his soul."

Later on he meets a beautiful, sentimental Italian girl, Emilia Viviani, imagines she is the perfect ideal which he had formed in his youth, and writes the *Epipsychidion*. "Emilia," says Professor Dowden, "beautiful, spiritual, sorrowing, became for him a type and symbol of all that is most radiant and divine in nature, all that is most remote and unattainable, yet ever to be pursued—the ideal of beauty truth, and love."[70] *Epipsychidion* is the poetic embodiment of the feelings awakened in Shelley by this supposed discovery of the incarnation of the ideal. Emilia turned out to be an ordinary human creature, and then Shelley wished to blot out the memory of her entirely. In a letter to Mr. Gisborne, June, 1822, Shelley says: "I think one is always in love with something or other; the error—and I confess it is not easy for spirits cased in flesh and blood to avoid it—consists in seeking in a mortal image the likeness of what is, perhaps eternal." "Such illusions," says Dowden, "may be of service in keeping alive within us the aspiration for the highest

[70] *Dowden's Life*, Vol. II, p. 373.

things, but assuredly they have a tendency to draw away from real persons some of those founts of feeling which are needed to keep fresh and bright the common ways and days of our life."[71]

Some of Shelley's views on women and the family were derived from Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Women*. "According to the prevailing opinion," says Mrs. Wollstonecraft, "women were made for men." All their cares and anxieties are directed towards getting husbands. They deck themselves out with artificial graces that enable them to exercise a short lived tyranny. "Love in their bosoms, taking place of every nobler passion, their sole ambition is to look fair, to raise emotion instead of inspiring respect; and this ignoble desire, like the servility in absolute monarchies, destroys all strength of character."[72] Women then should not depend on their charms alone, because these have little effect on their husband's heart "when they are seen every day when the summer is past and gone." Her first care should be to improve her mind, to exercise her God-given faculties, assert her individuality. This can never be, though, as long as she is the plaything of man. If one may contest the divine right of kings one may also contest the divine right of husbands. Women should bow only to reason and cease being the modest slaves of opinion. It is a violation of the sacred rights of humanity to exact blind obedience and meek submission of women. "The being who patiently endures injustice will soon become unjust."

In *The Revolt of Islam,* Cythna says:

> Can man be free if woman be a slave?
> Chain one who lives and breathes this boundless air,
> To the corruption of a closed grave!
> Can they whose mates are beasts condemned to bear
> Scorn, heavier far than toil or anguish, dare
> To trample their oppressors?

[71] *Life of Shelley*, Vol. II, p. 378.
[72] *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, ch. II, p. 38.

According to Pope "every woman is at heart a rake." "Now vexed gay and giddy by the whole tenor of their lives, the very aspect of wisdom or the severe graces of virtue must have a loathsome appearance to them." "Till women are led to exercise their understandings they should not be censured for their attachment to rakes."[1]

Shelley's opinion of women is even less complimentary:

> Woman! she is his slave, she has become
> A thing I weep to speak—the child of scorn,
> The outcast of a desolated home.
> Falsehood, and fear, and hate, like worms have worn
> Channels upon her cheek, which smiles adorn,
> As calm decks the false ocean. . . .[2]

"The parent," Mrs. Wollstonecraft writes, "who pays proper attention to helpless infancy has a right to require the same attention when the feebleness of age comes upon him. But to subjugate a rational being to the mere will of another, after he is of age to answer to society for his own conduct, is a most cruel and unjust stretch of power, and perhaps as injurious to morality as those religious systems which do not allow right and wrong to have any existence, but in the Divine will." Children should be taught early to submit to reason, "for to submit to reason is to submit to the nature of things and to that God who formed them so, to promote our real interest."[3]

> But children soon their parents trouble less
> Because they must obey . . .
> . . . and life is poisoned in its wells.[4]

"Obedience [were society as I could wish it] is a word which ought to be without meaning."[5]

Another book that interested Shelley very much was the

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[1] P. 128.
[2] *The Revolt of Islam*, Canto II, st. 36.
[3] *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, ch. XI.
[4] *The Revolt of Islam*, Canto VIII, st. 18.
[5] Miss Hitchener, Dec. 11, 1811.

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"*Memoires relatives a la Revolution Francaise*" of Louvet. Louvet was a licentious novelist and ardent Republican. He strongly opposed the tyranny of Marat and of Robespierre and the work of the commune of Paris. He was very courageous and often endangered his life by his opposition to the arbitrary measures of the Council. In 1793 he was obliged to flee for his life and the *Memoirs* contains interesting details of this flight. He and his wife were very devoted to each other, and this together with the man's courage made a strong impression on Shelley. "Je te laissai, mon chér Barbaroux; maix tu me le pardonnes; tu saiś quelle passion j'avais pour elle, et comme elle en était digne!" He goes to Paris in spite of the fact that he runs the risk of being seized and guillotined. "Quiconque n'epouvva point un pariel supplice ne saurait en avoir une juste idée. O Ladoiska! sans le souvenir de ton amour, qui donc aurait pu m' empecher de terminer mes peines?"[78]

Louvet and Ladoiska are reunited again, but only to be arrested soon afterwards. This causes her to exclaim, "Non, je jure que sans toi, la vie m'est tourment, un insupportable tourment, seule, je périrais bientôt, je périrais désesperée. Ah! permets, permets que nous mourions ensemble."[79]

This work may have suggested to Shelley the idea of making Laon and Cythna die together. Cythna tells Laon

> Darkness and death, if death be true, must be
> Dearer than life and hope if unenjoyed with thee.[80]

[78]P. 200, *Memoirs*.
[79]P. 281.
[80]Canto IX, st. 34.

CHAPTER III

POLITICS

Someone has said that if Shelley had not been a poet he would have been a politician. Certain it is that he gave to politics a great deal of thought and study. On January 26, 1819, Shelley wrote to Peacock: "I consider poetry very subordinate to political science, and, if I were well, certainly I would aspire to the latter, for I can conceive a great work embodying the discoveries of all ages, and harmonizing the contending creeds by which mankind have been ruled."[81] Shelley was not one who

> beheld the woe
> In which mankind was bound, and deem'd that fate
> Which made them abject, would preserve them so.

On the contrary, he firmly believed in man's capacity to work out his own regeneration. His tuneful lyre was ever at the service of the Goddess of Freedom; and he took occasion often to pour forth music calculated to rouse the nations from their apathy.

Very many of Shelley's views on political and social questions can be traced to Godwin's *Political Justice*. Godwin doubts that one can be said to have a mind. It may still be convenient to use the word "mind," but in fact what we know by that name is merely a chain of "ideas." Since man's mind is but an aggregate of ideas, man himself is capable of indefinite modification. Differences in men result wholly from differences of education. Feed a sinner on syllogisms and you can transform him into a saint. It is impossible for one to resist a clear exposition of the advantages of virtue. It follows, too, that we can easily abolish existing institutions and rearrange the whole structure of society on new principles infallibly correct. The force which is to spur us on to do this is reason. It is "omnipotent."

[81] *Ingpen*, p. 659.

Volney, Rousseau, Holbach, and the rest of this stamp, although condemning past systems of government, admitted that some form of government was necessary for the well-being of mankind. Godwin, on the other hand, denounced all government as "an institution of the most pernicious tendency." There is only one power to which man should yield obedience and that is the decision of his own understanding. Conditions being such as they are, government may be required for a while to restrain and direct men, but as soon as men will learn to follow reason, government will disappear altogether.

Godwin taught that every voluntary action flows solely from the decision of one's judgment. "Voluntary actions of men originate in all cases in their opinions," *i. e.*, in the state of their minds immediately previous to those actions. The nature of a man's actions, therefore, depends on the nature of his opinions. If he has just and true opinions his actions will be good; if erroneous ones, his actions will be bad. But "sound reasoning and truth adequately communicated must be victorious over error."[82] Man will always accept the truth if presented to him properly. It follows, then, that "reason and conviction appear to be the proper instruments for regulating the actions of mankind." Man's conduct should not conform to any other standard but reason. Obedience to law then is immoral, unless of course its mandates correspond to the decision of our own judgments. Shelley has the same idea

> The man
> Of virtuous soul commands not, nor obeys,
> Power, like a devastating pestilence
> Pollutes whate'er it touches; and obedience
> Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,
> Make slaves of men, and of the human frame
> A mechanized automaton.[83]

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[82]Book I, Ch. V, p. 87.
[83]*Queen Mab*, Canto III.

Again and again he exclaims against kings and autocracy. His sonnet, "England in 1819," is a terrible castigation of the Hanoverian Kings:

> An old, mad, blind, despised and dying king;
> Princes the dregs of their dull race, who flow
> Through public scorn—mud from a muddy spring.
> Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
> But leech-like to their fainting country cling,
> Till they drop blind in blood without a blow, etc., etc.

To aid republicanism he espoused the cause of the unhappy Caroline of Brunswick and on her account wrote "A New National Anthem," and the satirical piece, "Swellfoot the Tyrant." In "Hellas" we find him advocating the cause of Greece, and it is believed that this poem moved his friend Byron to take up arms in defense of that country.

"A king," writes Godwin, "is necessarily and unavoidably a despot in his heart." With him the words "ruler" and "tyrant" are synonymous. A king from the very nature of his office cannot be anything but vicious. Shelley expresses his opinion of kings as follows:

> The king, the wearer of a gilded chain
> That binds his soul to abjectness, the fool
> Whom courtiers nickname monarch, whilst a slave
> Even to the basest appetites.[84]

One wonders at first why Shelley should have represented evil as an eagle in *The Revolt of Islam*. The reason for this becomes clear when one considers that the eagle is often called a king among birds and is used as a symbol for authority.

Shelley, however, did not believe in violent revolutions. In *The Revolt of Islam*, Irish pamphlets, &c., he advocates reformation without recourse to force. A change must take place; kings must be done away with, but not until the people are prepared for the change. "A pure republic," he writes, "may be shown, by inferences the most obvious and irresistible, to

[84] *Queen Mab*, III, p. 9.

be that system of social order the fittest to produce the happiness and promote the genuine eminence of man. Yet nothing can less consist with reason or afford smaller hopes of any beneficial issue than the plan which should abolish the regal and the aristocratical branches of our constitution, before the public mind, through many gradations of improvement, shall have arrived at the maturity which shall disregard these symbols of its childhood."

Godwin and Shelley maintain that the state should make as little use as possible of coercion and violence. "Criminals should be pitied and reformed, not detested and punished." The punishment of death is particularly obnoxious to them. Shelley argues against it in his essay on *The Punishment of Death.* He claims that the punishment of death defeats its own end. It is a triumphant exhibition of suffering virtue, which may inspire some with pity, admiration and sympathy. As a consequence it may incite them to emulate their works, especially the works of political agitators. Punishment of death, again, excites those emotions which are inimical to social order. It strengthens all the inhuman and unsocial impulses of man. The contempt of human life breeds ferocity of manners and contempt of social ties. Hence it is, Shelley believes, that those nations in which the penal code has been particularly mild have been distinguished from all others by the rarity of crime.

Neither should the citizens of a state use violence in putting down oppression. In his address to the Irish he tells them that violence and folly will serve only to delay emancipation. "Mildness, sobriety, and reason are the effectual methods of forwarding the ends of liberty and happiness." Violence and falsehood will produce nothing but wretchedness and slavery and will make those who use them incapable of further exertion. Violence will immediately render their cause a bad one. Godwin likewise maintains that "force is an expedient the use of which is much to be deplored. It is contrary to the nature of intellect which cannot be improved but by conviction

and persuasion. It corrupts the man that employs it and the man upon whom it is employed."[85] In *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley says:

> Oh wherefore should ill ever flow from ill,
> And pain still keener pain forever breed?
> We are all brethren—even the slaves who kill
> For hire are men; and to avenge misdeed
> On the misdoer doth but misery feed
> With her own broken heart![86]

Godwin would reform society by means of education, so also would Shelley. They seem to differ though in their views with regard to the relations that exist between institutions and individuals. Godwin holds that tyrranical institutions must be abolished before men can become free. Shelley, on the contrary, says that the freedom and enlightenment of individuals should come first, and it is only when that is accomplished that tyrannical institutions will disappear. Godwin writes: "The only method according to which social improvements can be carried on is when the improvement of our institutions advances in a just proportion to the illumination of the public understanding.[87] While Shelley writes in his address to the Irish people that reform "is founded on the reform of private men and without individual amendment it is vain and foolish to expect the amendment of a state or government." Although Godwin says in the first book of *Political Justice* that it is futile to attempt to change morals without first changing our institutions, still, later on, he seems to forget this and to advocate the reform of individuals. "Make men wise," he writes, "and by that very operation you make them free. Civil liberty follows as a consequence of this."[88] Shelley, unlike Plato, would give to poets the first place in his plan for the reform of society.

[85] *Political Justice*, IV, 1.
[86] Canto V.
[87] *Political Justice*, I, 273.
[88] Ibid., p. 259.

He calls them "the acknowledged legislators of the world."[89]

Godwin's principle of justice is that each should do to others all the good that is in his power. It is an impartial treatment of every man in matters that relate to his happiness—a treatment which is to be measured solely by a consideration of the properties of the receiver and the capacity of him who bestows. Everything should be so disposed—material comforts so distributed as to give the same amount of pleasure to all. Personal and private feelings such as gratitude and parental affection should be destroyed. A just man will consider the general good only. Hence if my father and a stranger who is of more benefit to society than my father are both in danger of death, I am bound to try to save the stranger first.[90] Shelley has something similar to this in his *Essay on Christianity:* "I love my country, I love the city in which I was born, my parents, my wife and the children of my care, and to these children, this woman, this nation, it is incumbent on me to do all the benefits in my power. . . . You ought to love all mankind, nay every individual of mankind. You ought not to love the individuals of your domestic circle less, but to love those who exist beyond it more." Godwin says that one principle of justice is "to be no respecter of persons."[91] In a letter to Miss Hitchener, October, 1811, Shelley writes: "I . . . set myself up as no respecter of persons." "The end of virtue," says Godwin, "is to add to the sum of pleasurable sensation." In the *Essay on Christianity* Shelley writes: "This and no other is justice: to consider under all circumstances and consequences of a particular case how the greatest quantity and purest quality of happiness will ensue from any action; this is to be just; and there is no other justice," Godwin[92] attempts to tell how we can find out whether an action would be just

[89] *Defense of Poetry.*
[90] *Defense of Poetry.*
[91] *Political Justice,* Book II, Chap. II, p. 126.
[92] *Political Justice,* I, p. 126.

or not. He warns us against measuring the morality of an action according to existing laws. We can determine its morality only by trying to estimate the amount of happiness or pain it will cause others. "One of the best practical rules of morality," he writes, "is that of putting ourselves in the place of another. . . . It is by this means only that we can form an adequate idea of his pleasures and pains."[93] Shelley expresses the same thought in his *Defense of Poetry:* "A man to be greatly good must imagine intensely and comprehensively; he must put himself in the place of another and many others; the pains and pleasures of his species must become his own."

For Shelley laws are "obscure records of dark and barbarous echos," "tomes of reasoned wrong glozed on by ignorance."[94] Lawyers are those who, skilled to snare

> The feet of justice in the toils of law
> Stand, ready to oppress the weaker still.[95]

"Government," he says, "cannot make a law, it can only pronounce that which was the law before its organization, *viz.:* the moral result of the imperishable relations of things;"[96] and in his *Address to the Irish:* "No act of a national representation can make anything wrong which was not wrong before: it cannot change virtue and truth." All this is merely a repetition of Godwin's principles. "Immutable reason," he says, "is the true legislator, and her decrees it behooves us to investigate. The functions of society extend, not to the making, but the interpreting of law; it cannot decree, it can only declare that which the nature of things has already decreed."[97]

Godwin was a communist rather than a socialist. Every kind of cooperation was repugnant to him. With regard to the

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[93] *Enquirer*, p. 298.
[94] *Prom. Unbound*, III, 4, 167.
[95] *Queen Mab.*
[96] *Decl. of Rights*, art. 15.
[97] *Political Justice*, I, p. 221.

distribution of wealth he taught that any given article belonged to him to whom it will give the greatest sum of benefit or pleasure. A loaf of bread, *v. g.*, belongs to the man who needs it most. Shelley holds that if the properties of the aristocrats were resolved into their original stock, and if each earned his own living, each would be happy and contented, and crime and the temptation to crime would scarcely exist. "If two children," he writes, "were placed together in a desert island and they found some scarce fruit, would not justice dictate an equal division? If this number is multiplied to any extent of which number is capable, if these children are men, families—is not justice capable of the same extension and multiplication? Is it not the same, are not its decrees invariable?"[98] Again in his *Essay on Christianity:* "With all those who are truly wise, there will be an entire community not only of thoughts and feelings but also of external possessions." Both Shelley and Godwin put the rent-roll of lands in the same class as the pension-list which is supposed to be employed in the purchase of ministerial majorities.

It is a calculation of Godwin, says Shelley, "that all the conveniences of civilized life might be produced if society would divide the labor equally among its members, by each individual being employed in labor two hours during the day."[99] Godwin says that the means of subsistence belong entirely to the owner. The fruits of labor belong to the laborer, but he is only the steward of them. He can consume only what he needs, and must preserve and dispense the rest for the benefit of others. In his *Essay on Christianity,* Shelley writes "every man in proportion to his virtue considers himself, with respect to the great community of mankind, as the steward and guardian of their interests in the property which he chances to possess."[100] When Shelley proposed to share his

[98] Letter to Elizabeth Hitchener, July 26, 1811.
[99] Notes to *Queen Mab.*
[100] Shelley Memorials, *Essay on Christianity,* p. 297.

income with Elizabeth Hitchener he said that he was not doing an act of generosity, but one of justice—"bare, simple justice." Godwin says that new inventions and the refinements of luxury are inimical to the welfare of society. These mean more work for the poor while only the rich are benefited.[101] "The poor," writes Shelley, "are set to labor—for what? Not the food for which they famish; not the blankets for want of which . . . no; for the pride of power, for the miserable isolation of pride, for the false pleasures of the hundredth part of society." Godwin says that the direct pleasure which luxuries give is very small. They are prized because of the love of distinction which is characteristic of every human mind. Fine bonnets and wealth would not be desired by a family living on a desert island. Why not let the acquisition of learning and the practice of virtue instead of wealth be the road to fame. Shelley writes—

> And statesman boasts
> Of wealth. . . . How vainly seek
> The selfish for that happiness denied
> To aught but virtue.[102]

Again: "the man who has fewest bodily wants approachest nearest to the Divine Nature. Satisfy these wants at the cheapest rates and expend the remaining energies of your nature in the attainment of virtue and knowledge. . . . Ye can spend no labor on mechanism consecrated to luxury and pride."[103] "There is no wealth in the world," says Godwin, "except this, the labor of man."[104] Every new luxury is a new weight thrown on the shoulders of the laborer, for which they receive no benefit. In the *Notes to Queen Mab,* Shelley writes: "there is no real wealth but the labor of man." "What is misnamed wealth," writes Godwin, "is merely a power vested

[101] Book VIII, ch. 2.
[102] *Queen Mab,* V.
[103] *Essay on Christianity,* p. 302.
[104] *The Enquirer,* Part II, essay 2; also *Political Justice,* Book VIII, ch. 2.

in certain individuals by the institutions of society to compel others to labor for their benefit.[105] "Wealth," says Shelley, "is a power usurped by the few to compel the many to labor for their benefit."[106]

Shelley during his sojurn in Ireland, in the spring of 1813, published the *Declaration of Rights*. This pamphlet afterwards led to the arrest of his Irish servant, Daniel Hill, for distributing the same without authority. Many propositions of the *Declaration of Rights* bear considerable resemblance to some of the proposals of the *Declaration of Rights* adopted by the Constitutional Assembly of France in August, 1789.

No. 3 of Shelley's *Declaration* reads as follows: "Government is devised for the security of rights. The rights of men are liberty and an equal participation in the commonage of nature." Proposition No. 2 of the *Constituent Assembly* is: "The object of every political association is the conservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, security, resistance to oppression."

In No. 4 Shelley says: "As the benefit of the governed is, ought to be, the origin of government, no man can have any authority that does not expressly emanate from their will. The corresponding constituent proposition is: "The principle of all authority resides essentially in the nation; no body, no individual can exercise any authority that does not expressly emanate from it."

Compare Shelley's No. 6 with Nos. 1 and 17. No. 6: "All have a right to an equal share in the benefits and burdens of the government. Any disabilities for opinions imply, by their very existence, barefaced tyranny on the side of the government, ignorant slavishness on the side of the governed." No. 1 of the *Assembly*: "Men are born and remain free and equal. Social distinctions can only be founded on the common good." No. 17: "Property being an inviolable and sacred right, no

[105] *Political Enquirer*, p. 177.
[106] Notes to *Queen Mab*.

one can be deprived of it, unless public necessity evidently demands it, and then only on condition that indemnity be made."

No. 7 of the *Declaration* resembles the constituent Nos. 8 and 9. Shelley says: "The rights of man in the present state of society are only to be secured by some degree of coercion to be exercised on their violator. The sufferer has a right that the degree of coercion employed be as light as possible."

No. 8: "The law should establish only those punishments that are strictly and evidently necessary, &c."

No. 9: ". . . all unnecessary severity should be repressed by law."

Shelley's No. 9 and the constituent No. 7 declare that no man has the right to resist the law.

No. 15 of the *Declaration* resembles No. 5 of the *Constituent Assembly*. No. 15: "Law cannot make what is in its nature virtuous or innocent to be criminal, any more than it can make what is criminal to be innocent. Government cannot make a law; it can only pronounce that which was the law before its organization, *viz.*, the moral result of the imperishable relation of things." No. 5: "Law has only the right to prohibit those actions which are injurious to society. Anything that is not forbidden by the law cannot be prevented, and no one can be constrained to do that which is not ordained by law."

Shelley's No. 21 is: "The government of a country ought to be perfectly indifferent to every opinion. Religious differences, the bloodiest and most rancorous of all, spring from partiality." This corresponds to constituent No. 10: "No one should be disturbed on account of his opinions, even religious ones, provided their manifestation does not endanger the public order established by law."

Finally compare Shelley's No. 27 with constituent No. 6. No. 27: "No man has a right to be respected for any other possessions but those of virtue and talents. Titles are tinsel,

power a corruptor, glory a bubble, and excessive wealth a libel on its possessor. No. 6: "All citizens, being equal in the eyes of the law, are equally admissable to every dignity, position, and public employment according to their capacity, and without any other distinction but those of virtue and talents."

Shelley's political views were somewhat modified by the influence of Leigh Hunt. The two friends probably met for the first time in January, 1814. Both were sensitive and of a retiring disposition, dwelling in a world of books and dreams. Hunt, like Shelley, advocated Catholic emancipation, freedom of the press, and reform of parliamentary representation. He differed from Shelley in this, that he was more practical, and had more faith than his friend in the advantages of such partial reforms as the abolition of child labor and of the slave trade, the reduction and equalization of taxes, and the education of the poor. Hunt advocated the reform of military discipline, while Shelley claimed that standing armies should be abolished altogether. Hunt carried on his attacks against the evils of the time in the pages of *The Examiner,* which everybody read in those days. In 1813 the Hunt brothers were fined and imprisoned for an offensive article on the Prince Regent which appeared in their paper. Shelley must have offered to pay this fine, as Hunt records in his autobiography that Shelley made him a princely offer. In December, 1816, the Shelleys, after their return from the continent, were the guests of Hunt at Hampstead and received his support and sympathy during the Chancery suit. Through Hunt, Shelley made the acquaintance of the Cockney circle, including Keats, Hazlitt, Reynolds, Novello, Brougham and Horace Smith. In return for all this Shelley gave freely of his money to Hunt.

One acquainted with the Englishman's sense of honor may wonder at the unusual way Hunt and Godwin accepted money from Shelley and others. It must be remembered though that these men believed no man had exclusive ownership in

superfluous wealth. They received what Shelley could spare as if they were taking what belonged to themselves.

Early in 1817 Shelley wrote *A Proposal for Putting Reform to a Vote,* a pamphlet which today in England would be considered conservative. It suggested that a meeting be held at the Crown and Anchor Tavern "to take into consideration the most effectual measures for ascertaining whether or no a reform in Parliament is the will of the majority of the individuals of the British nation. It disclaimed any design of sanctioning the revolutionary schemes which were imputed to the friends of reform, and declares that its object is purely constitutional. The pamphlet advocates annual parliaments, but not universal suffrage. In it Shelley expresses himself in favor of retaining the regal and aristocratical branches of our constitution until the public mind "shall have arrived at the maturity that can disregard these symbols of its childhood." "Political institutions," he there writes, "are undoubtedly susceptible of such improvement as no rational person can consider possible as long as the present degraded condition to which the vital imperfections in the existing system of government has reduced the vast multitude of men shall subsist. The securest method of arriving at such beneficial innovations is to proceed gradually and with caution."

In February, 1817, the Shelleys went to live at Marlow. There was much suffering among the lacemakers of that town and Shelley went continually among the unfortunate population, relieving the most pressing cases of distress to the best of his ability. He had a list of pensioners to whom he made a weekly allowance. One day he returned home without shoes, having given them away to a poor man.

On March 11, 1818, Shelley, accompanied by his family, quitted England, never again to return. In Italy, as in England, he continually changed his place of abode. During the year 1818 he wrote *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills, Julian and Maddalo,* and also began *Prometheus Unbound.*

This last work was completed in Rome during the summer and fall of 1819. "The poem," he says in the preface, "was chiefly written upon the mountainous ruins of the baths of Caracalla, among the flowery glades and thickets of odoriferous blossoming trees which are extended in everwinding labyrinths upon its immense platforms and dizzy arches suspended in the air." *Prometheus Unbound* is considered by many to be Shelley's most important work. Mr. J. A. Symonds declares that "a genuine liking for it may be reckoned the touchstone of a man's capacity for understanding lyric poetry." Mr. Rossetti waxes eloquent over "The immense scale and boundless scope of the conception; the marble majesty and extramundane passions of the personages; the sublimity of ethical aspiration; the radiance of ideal and poetic beauty which saturates every phase of the subject."

Prometheus, according to W. Rossetti, is the mind of man. In his preface to the poem Shelley writes: "But Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends." At the opening of the drama Prometheus is discovered bound to an icy precipice in the Indian Caucasus. He is kept there by the tyrant Jupiter, whom he helped to enthrone in place of Saturn. Mercury is sent to Prometheus and offers him freedom from torture on condition that he reveal the secret of averting the fall of Jupiter. This Prometheus refuses to do because it would seat the tyrant more securely on his throne. He is then left to the untender mercies of the Furies. These torture him by making him contemplate all the misery of the world and the futility of hoping for any release from it. They expose to view the wrecks of all the schemes ever advanced for the regeneration of society, and especially the hate, bloodshed, and misery which followed in the wake of the most promising of them all, the French Revolution. They remind him that Christ's mission is a failure; that His followers are perse-

cuted; and that Christianity has not lessened the deceit and selfishness of man. The anguish of Prometheus is mental rather than physical. He cries out to the Furies

> Thy words are like a cloud of winged snakes,
> And yet I pity those they torture not.

His hope and optimism, however, triumph over all; and the Furies vanish. A chorus of spirits come to console him and promise that he shall overcome Death. Prometheus feels, nevertheless, that all hope is vain without love. Conditions will remain as they are until Asia, the spirit of love in nature, will be freed. At the end of the first act one of the nymphs, Panthea, departs to seek Asia. She is found in a lovely vale and is described as a being of exquisite beauty, "whose footsteps pave the world with loveliness." Panthea then conducted Asia to the cave of Demogorgon. This being has neither limb, nor form, nor outline; yet it is felt to be a living spirit. Asia asks it when will the destined hour arrive for the release of Prometheus. The answer is "Behold!" and just then the roof of the cave bursts asunder, and the chariots of the Hours are seen passing by. One of them stops and tells Asia that nightfall "will wrap heaven's kingless throne in lasting night." Asia is transformed before them. Misery gives place to love and joy. Another spirit with "dove-like eyes of hope" conducts Asia to the throne of Jupiter.

The third act presents the catastrophe. It opens with a long speech of Jupiter in which he exults over what he believes to be the approaching conquest of man's soul. Little does he realize, however, that his fall is at hand. The car of the Hour arrives with Demogorgon. At this sight Jupiter is filled with terror and exclaims, "Awful shape, what art thou?" Demogorgon answers, "Eternity. Demand no direr name. Descend and follow me down the abyss." The secret is now revealed. Jupiter has just married Thetis and the child of this union is to destroy his father. The curse is fulfilled; Jupiter falls into the abyss. Prometheus is then released by

Hercules. Strength ministers to wisdom, courage, and long-suffering Love, as a slave to its master. Prometheus is united with Asia; mankind with love. The Golden Age has at last arrived. Henceforth there is to be no tyranny nor evil of any kind. Love is to be supreme and is to make all wise and happy. Man is released from bondage and is now free to do as reason directs.

> The loathsome mask has fallen, the man remains,
> Scepterless, free, uncircumscribed, but man
> Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,
> Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king
> Over himself; just, gentle, wise; but man,
> Passionless? no, yet free from guilt or pain,
> Which were, for his will made or suffered them,
> Nor yet exempt, tho' ruling them like slaves,
> From chance, and death, and mutability,
> The clogs of that which else might oversoar
> The loftiest star of unascended heaven,
> Pinnacled dim in the intense inane.

The drama should end here. The tyrant is overthrown and man is happy. In a note on the play Mrs. Shelley says that it originally had but three acts. Later on a fourth act was added, a sort of hymn of rejoicing over the fulfillment of the prophecies with regard to Prometheus. In it specters of the dead hours bear time to tomb in eternity. The spirits of the mind reappear and chant their hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

Prometheus represents mankind. He is oppressed by the very being, Jupiter, to whom he himself has given power. Jupiter must not be considered as the abstract power of moral evil. He represents those institutions, political and religious, which man himself has created. Jupiter's downfall is brought about by his own offspring; man himself can overthrow tyranny. In the marriage of Jupiter and Thetis, Shelley seems to portray the overweening arrogance through which a political tyranny invests itself with the pomp of a false glory and

which always precedes its downfall. The form of Demogorgon assumed by the child of this union undoubtedly means Revolution, that Revolution which follows the marriage of unrighteous power to arrogant display.[107] Demogorgon may be looked upon, too, as Reason; Asia, the Spirit of Love, comes in contact with Demogorgon, Reason, and moves it to action. The poet here means to image to us the profound truth, that it is only through contact with emotion that abstract thought can become roused to action and be a vital and dynamic power in the sphere of practical life. It is only after having met Demogorgon that the power of Asia is set free. If reason must be inspired by passion before it can prevail, "love on the other hand must become instinct with wisdom before it can be made manifest in that glory which shall save the world."

After the interview with Demogorgon, Asia, love, is transfigured, "its rosy warmth pervades the whole creation, and its power is revealed triumphantly supreme. This is the act through which, in the secret mystery of creation, the redemption of Prometheus is achieved. Thus through a double process, destructive and constructive—by revolution and by love—is set free the human soul."[108] Rossetti regards Prometheus as the anthropomorphic God, created by the mind of man, and tyrannizing over its creator; but surely, as Miss Scudder says, the myth is quite as much political as theological.

Prometheus Unbound was fiercely attacked in the *Quarterly*, and Shelley, thinking that Southey was the author of the article, wrote to him about it. Southey answered him that he did not write the article in question, and at the same time read him a lecture on the necessity of giving up his evil principles. Shelley felt that he was being misjudged and wrongfully accused by one whom he could not suspect of ill-will, and this no doubt helped to keep him a radical, even if he were inclined at this time to become more conservative.

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[107] V. D. Scudder: *Introduction to Prometheus Unbound.*
[108] Ibid.

During 1819, meetings were held all over the country by the laboring classes to consider ways and means of bettering their condition. On August 16, 1819, a huge one was held at St. Peter's Field, Manchester, with the view of urging parliamentary reform. The magistrates had previously declared that such a meeting would be illegal and the city authorities had made extensive preparations for the preservation of the peace. After an enormous crowd had gathered around the speakers, forty of the yeomanry cavalry attempted to make their way through the multitude to arrest the ringleaders. When it was found that they could not reach the platform a hasty order was given to three hundred hussars to disperse the crowd. They made a terrific charge, which resulted in the killing of six people and in the wounding of fifty or sixty others. The news of this affair roused in Shelley violent emotions of indignation and compassion. Writing to his publisher, Mr. Ollier, he thus comments on the affair: "The same day that your letter came, came the news of the Manchester work, and the torrent of my indignation has not yet done boiling in my veins. I wait anxiously to hear how the country will express its sense of this bloody, murderous oppression of its destroyers. Something must be done. What, yet, I know not." He calls it "an infernal business" and says that it is but the distant thunders of the terrible storm which is fast approaching. "The tyrants here, as in the French Revolution, have first shed blood."

The Manchester "massacre" inspired Shelley to write the *Mask of Anarchy.* Leigh Hunt was asked to print it in *The Examiner,* but he refused. "I did not insert it," Hunt wrote, "because I thought that the public at large had not become sufficiently discerning to do justice to the sincerity and kind-heartedness of the spirit that walked in this flaming robe of verse." In this poem Shelley is not so vague and indefinite as he is in *Prometheus Unbound.* He shows there that he has a grasp of the practical wants of men. "What art thou, Freedom?" Shelley asks, and he replies:

Thou art clothes, and fire, and food
For the trampled multitude—
No—in countries that are free
Such starvation cannot be
As in England now we see.

Even here Shelley exhorts his countrymen to seek reform through peaceful methods. He tells them to oppose meekness and resoluteness to violence and tyranny; and then the tyrants

will return with shame
To the place from which they came
And the blood thus shed will speak
In hot blushes on their cheek.

There is very little recorded concerning the relations that existed between Robert Owen (England's first socialist of note) and Shelley. One of Owen's biographers states that Shelley's spirit appeared to Owen at a spiritualistic seance, and that Owen exclaimed, "Oh, there is my old friend, Shelley." It is certain at any rate that Owen was a close friend of Godwin, and consequently had at least an indirect influence on Shelley. *Queen Mab,* moreover, was the gospel of the Owenites.

For Shelley's later views we are indebted to his *Philosophical View of Reform* which Professor Dowden discusses in his volume *Transcripts and Studies.* Shelley wrote to Leigh Hunt on May 26, 1820, and enquired if he knew any bookseller who would publish an octavo volume, entitled a *Philosophical View of Reform.* The plan of the work was to include chapters on: (1) The sentiment of the necessity of change; (2) its causes and its objects; (3) practicability and necessity of change; (4) state of parties as regards it; (5) probable, possible, and desirable mode in which it should be effected. The work was never published, however, and it is said that the manuscript cannot now be found.[109]

[109]Letter of Prof. Dowden to the author.

The treatise opens with a brief historical survey of the chief movements on behalf of freedom which have taken place since the beginning of the Christian era. He describes historical Christianity as a perversion of the utterances and actions of the great reformer of Nazareth. "The names borrowed from the life and opinions of Jesus Christ were employed as symbols of domination and imposture; and a system of liberality and equality, for such was the system preached by that great reformer, was perverted to support oppression." He eulogizes the philosophers of the eighteenth century and sees in the Government of the United States the first fruits of their teaching. Two conditions are necessary to a perfect government: first, "that the will of the people should be represented as it is"; secondly, "that that will should be as wise and just as possible." The former of these obtains in the United States; and, in so far as the people are represented, "America fulfills imperfectly and indirectly the last and most important condition of perfect government."

He then condemns "the device of public credit" and the new aristocracy which arose with it. This new order has its basis in fraud, as the old had its basis in force. It includes attorneys, excisemen, directors, government pensioners, usurers, stock jobbers, with their dependents and descendants.

What are the reforms that he advocates? Today some of them would be considered too mild by even a conservative. He would abolish the national debt, the standing army, and tithes, due regard had to vested interests. He would grant complete freedom to thought and its expression, and make the dispensation of justice cheap, speedy and attainable by all.

A reform government should appoint tribunals to decide upon the claims of property holders. True, political institutions ought to defend every man in the retention of property acquired through labor, economy, skill, genius or any similar powers honorably and innocently exerted. "But there is another species of property which has its foundation in usurpa-

tion or imposture, or violence." "Of this nature is the principal part of the property enjoyed by the aristocracy and the great fundholders." "Claims to property of this kind should be compromised under the supervision of public tribunals."

From an abstract point of view, universal suffrage is just and desirable, but since it would lead to an attempt to abolish the monarchy and to civil war some other measure must be tried instead. Mr. Bentham and other writers have urged the admission of females to the right of suffrage. "This attempt," Shelley writes, "seems somewhat immature." The people should be better represented in the House of Commons than they are at present. He would allow the House of Lords to remain for the present to represent the aristocracy.

All reform should be based upon the principle of "the natural equality of man, not as regards property, but as regards rights."

"Whether the reform, which is now inevitable, be gradual and moderate or violent and extreme depends largely on the action of the government." If the government refuse to act, the nation will take the task of reformation into its own hands and the abolition of monarchy must inevitably follow. "No friend of mankind and of his country can desire that such a crisis should arrive." "If reform shall be begun by the existing government, let us be contented with a limited beginning with any whatsoever opening. Nothing is more idle than to reject a limited benefit because we cannot without great sacrifices obtain an unlimited one." "We shall demand more and more with firmness and moderation, never anticipating but never deferring the moment of successful opposition, so that the people may become capable of exercising the functions of sovereignty in proportion as they acquire the possession of it."

The struggle between the oppressed and the oppressors will be merely nominal if the oppressed are enlightened and animated by a distinct and powerful apprehension of their object.

"The minority perceive the approaches of the development of an irresistible force, by the influence of the public opinion of their weakness on those political forms, of which no government but an absolute despotism is devoid. They divest themselves of their usurped distinctions, and the public tranquillity is not disturbed by the revolution." The true patriot, then, should endeavor to enlighten the nation and animate it with enthusiasm and confidence. He will endeavor to rally round one standard the divided friends of liberty, and make them forget the subordinate objects with regard to which they differ by appealing to that respecting which they are all agreed.

Shelley seems to think that revolutionary wars are seldom or never necessary. A vigilant spirit of opposition, together with a campaign of enlightenment, will usually suffice to bring about the desired reforms. It is better to gain what we demand by a process of negotiation which would occupy twenty years than to do anything which might tend towards civil war. "The last resort of resistance is undoubtedly insurrection."

The work ends with a consideration of the nature and consequences of war. "War waged from whatever motive extinguishes the sentiment of reason and justice in the mind."

Shelley, following Godwin and Condorcet, was a firm believer in the perfectibility of human nature. "By perfectible," Godwin writes, "it is not meant that man is capable of being wrought to perfection. The idea of absolute perfection is scarcely within the grasp of human understanding." "The wise man is satisfied with nothing. Finite things must be perpetually capable of increase and advancement; it would argue, therefore, extreme folly to rest in any given state of improvement and imagine we had attained our summit."[110] In a letter to E. Hitchener, July 25, 1811, Shelley writes:

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[110] *Political Justice*, IV, 2.

"You say that equality is unattainable; so, will I observe is perfection; yet they both symbolize in their nature, they both demand that an unremitting tendency towards themselves should be made; and the nearer society approaches towards this point the happier it will be."

The development of the race, they believe, has been along the following lines: Man emerged from the savage state under the attraction of pleasure and the repulsion of pain. Self-love, his only motive of action, made him at once social and industrious, led him to confound happiness with unregulated enjoyment, made him avaricious and violent, and caused the strong to oppress the weak and the weak to conspire against the strong. Slavery and corruption have consequently followed on the liberty and innocence of primitive times. But as man is perfectible this condition of things cannot last. The diffusion of knowledge together with the discoveries and inventions recently made, have already been productive of great progress. Humanity is now fairly started on a career of conquest; the emancipation of the mind is rapidly advancing. Soon morality itself will come to be rationally viewed; it will be universally acknowedged that there is only one law, that of nature; only one code, that of reason; only one throne, that of justice; and only one altar, that of concord.[111] Shelley had unbounded faith in human nature and believed that the downfall of tyranny must soon take place. He believed that the world would resolve itself into one large communistic family, where every man would be independent and free.

Godwin says that "there will be no war, no crime, no administration of justice, as it is called, and no government. Besides this there will be neither disease, anguish, melancholy or resentment."[112] The sun of reason will of itself disperse all the mists of ignorance and the pestilential vapors of vice. It will bring out all the beauty and goodness of man. Love will be

[111]Flint: *Philosophy of History*, p. 323.
[112]*Political Justice*, Book 8, 9.

universal; everybody will seek the good of all. Earth, Shelley thinks, will soon become a garden of delight.

> O Happy Earth, reality of Heaven
> Of purest Spirits thou pure dwelling-place
> Where care and sorrow, impotence and crime
> Languor, disease, and ignorance dare not come.[113]

[113] *Queen Mab.*

CHAPTER IV.

RELIGION AND PHILOSOPHY

We now come to that part of our subject which is the most difficult to handle—Shelley's religion. There are so many seeming contradictions in his utterances on this subject that it would appear impossible at first sight to reconcile them and bring out of them a consistent form of belief. Before he went to Oxford he had attacked Christianity, still on his entrance to that university he made the required profession of belief in the doctrines of the Church of England as by law established. How are we going to reconcile this with his love for truth? One cannot get away from the difficulty by saying that this profession was a mere formality. Thousands of nonconformists throughout the land denied themselves the benefits of a university education because they scorned to play the hypocrite.

Shelley's views were fairly orthodox up to the time of his going to Oxford. *Zastrozzi*, printed in 1810, contains a bitter attack on atheism; and in a letter to Stockdale Shelley disclaims any intention of advocating atheism in *The Wandering Jew*. He, no doubt, was unorthodox in his views regarding the nature of God; but his belief in the immortality of the soul and in the existence of a First Cause is clearly shown in a letter to Hogg dated January 3, 1811. He writes: "I may not be able to adduce proofs, but I think that the leaf of a tree, the meanest insect on which we trample, are in themselves arguments more conclusive than any which can be advanced, that some vast intellect animates infinity. If we disbelieve this, the strongest argument in support of the existence of a future state instantly becomes annihilated. . . . Love, love, infinite in extent, eternal in duration, yet allowing your theory in that point, perfectible, should be the reward; but can we suppose that this reward will arise, spontaneously, as a necessary appendage to our nature, or that our nature itself

could be without cause—a God? When do we see effects arise without causes?" From this point a rapid change takes place in his opinions. This is the work of the sceptic Hogg, who sported with him, now arguing for, now against Christianity, with the result that Shelley himself became sceptical. His disbelief is due also to the influence of the works of Godwin and the French materialists, Helvetius, Holbach, Condorcet and Rousseau.

In his *System of Nature* Helvetius makes an eloquent plea for atheism. He denies that any kind of spiritual substance exists. In the universe there is nothing but matter and motion. Man is the result of certain combinations of matter; his activities are matter in motion. God, the soul, and immortality are the inventions of impostors to lash men into obedience and submission. In *Queen Mab* Shelley represents God and religion as the cause of evil, and scoffs at the idea of creation.

> From an eternity of idleness
> I, God, awoke.[114]

A blasphemous caricature of our Savior and of the doctrine of redemption is also there exhibited. Later on he grew to love Christ, although he declaimed against Christianity as long as he lived. In *Prometheus Unbound* he treats our Savior more reverently than he did in *Queen Mab*. He is there in sympathy with the spirit of Christ, and denounces Christianity only in so far as it has abandoned "the faith he kindled." This change, no doubt, is due to the influence of his residence in Italy and of his love for the New Testament. Regarding the character of Christ he writes: "They (the evangelists) have left sufficiently clear indications of the genuine character of Jesus Christ to rescue it forever from the imputations cast upon it by their ignorance and fanataeism. We discover that He

[114]Cf. Volney, Les Ruines, "Dieu apres avoir passe une eternite sans rien faire prit enfin le dessin de produire le monde."

[115]*Essay on Christianity*, p. 291.

is the enemy of oppression and falsehood";[115] that He was just, truthful, and merciful; "that He was a man of meek and majestic demeanor; of natural and simple thought and habits, beloved by all, unmoved, solemn and serene."

One of the greatest obstacles that prevented Shelley from understanding Christianity was his belief in Godwin's doctrine that sin is but an error of judgment. His wife writes that "he believed mankind had only to will that there should be no evil and there would be none." To one believing that mediation is superfluous in the work of sanctification, Christianity is almost meaningless. Three months before his death Shelley expressed his views with regard to Christianity as follows: "I differ with Moore in thinking Christianity useful to the world; no man of sense can think it true. . . . I agree with him that the doctrines of the French and material philosophy are as false as they are pernicious; but still they are better than Christianity, inasmuch as anarchy is better than despotism; for this reason, that the former is for a season, and the latter is eternal."[116]

The question whether Shelley was an atheist or not must not be decided on one or two extracts from his writings or even on any one work. True he argued against theism, but to call him an atheist on that account would be as logical as to say St. Thomas was an atheist because he advanced objections against the existence of God. One reason for the opinion that he was an atheist lies in the fact that he had a conception of the Deity which differed from the Puritanical one then in vogue. When he attempted to show the nonexistence of God his negation was directed against the notions of God which exhibited Him as a Being with human passions, as an autocratic tyrant. In his letter to Lord Ellenborough he writes: "To attribute moral qualities to the spirit of the universe . . . is to degrade God into man." He denied the existence of the God represented as "a venerable old man, seated on a

[116] Letter to Horace Smith, April 11, 1822.

throne of clouds, His breast the theater of various passions analogous to those of humanity, His will changeable and uncertain as that of an earthly king."[117] Even in *Queen Mab* we find a vague picture of his conception of God:

> Spirit of Nature! all sufficing power
> Necessity! thou mother of the world!
> Unlike the God of human error, thou
> Requirest no prayers or praise, the caprice
> Of man's weak will belongs no more to thee
> Than do the changeful passions of his breast
> To thy unvarying harmony."[118]

But in the next canto does he not say explicitly, "There is no God"? In a note, though, he explains that "this negation must be understood solely to affect a creative Deity. The hypothesis of a pervading Spirit coeternal with the universe remains unshaken." Elsewhere he writes: "The thoughts which the word 'God' suggest to the human mind are susceptible of as many variations as human minds themselves. The stoic, the platonist, and the epicurean, the polytheist, the dualist, and the trinitarian differ entirely in their conceptions of its meaning. They agree only in considering it the most awful and most venerable of names, as a common term to express all of mystery, or majesty, or power which the invisible world contains. And not only has every sect distinct conceptions of the application of this name, but scarcely two individuals of the same sect, which exercise in any degree the freedom of their judgment, or yield themselves with any candor of feeling to the influences of the visible, find perfect coincidence of opinion to exist between them. . . . God is neither the Jupiter who sends rain upon the earth; nor the Venus through whom all living things are produced; nor the Vulcan who presides over the terrestrial element of fire; nor the Vesta that preserves the light which is enshrined in the sun, the moon, and the stars. He is neither the Proteus, nor the Pan of the mate-

[117] Letter to Lord Ellenborough, June, 1812.
[118] *Queen Mab*.

rial world. But the word 'God' unites all the attributes which these denominations contain and is the (inter-point) and overruling spirit of all the energy and wisdom included within the circle of existing things."[119]

But did he not write *The Necessity of Atheism* for which he was expelled from Oxford? Even if he did, this does not prove that he was an atheist. We saw already that he loved to advance objections and propound difficulties to people who thought they knew everything that can be known about a subject. Many stoutly maintained that a valid *a priori* proof (usually called the ontological) can be advanced for the existence of God and it was against these that Shelley directed his artillery. "Why," Trelawny asked him once, "do you call yourself an atheist?" "It is a word of abuse," Shelley replied, "to stop discussion; a painted devil to frighten the foolish; a threat to intimidate the wise and good. I used it to express my abhorrence of superstition. I took up the word as a knight took up a gauntlet in defiance of injustice."[120]

Leigh Hunt said that Shelley "did himself injustice with the public in using the popular name of the Supreme Being inconsiderately. He identified it solely with the most vulgar and tyrannical notions of a God made after the worst human fashion." Southey told him also that he ought not to call himself an athiest, since in reality he believed that the universe is God.[121] "I love to doubt and to discuss," Shelley writes, and it is for this reason that he adopted the arguments of Locke, Hume, and Holbach. He does not doubt the existence of God; he simply doubts that it is capable of proof. In January 12, 1811, it seemed to him that he had hit upon the long-sought-for-proof. In a letter to Hogg he writes: "Stay, I have an idea. I think I can prove the existence of a Deity—a First Cause. I will ask a materialist, how came this uni-

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[119] *Essay on Christianity. Shelley Memorials*, p. 275.
[120] *Recollections by Trelawny*, p. 40.
[121] Letter to E. Hitchener, Jan. 2, 1812.

verse at first? He will answer by chance. What chance? I will answer in the words of Spinoza: 'An infinite number of atoms had been floating from all eternity in space, till at last one of them fortuitously diverged from its track, which dragging with it another, formed the principle of gravitation and in consequence the universe.' What cause produced this change, this chance. For where do we know that causes arise without their corresponding effects; at least we must here, on so abstract a subject, reason analogically. Was not this then a cause; was it not a first cause? Was not this first cause a Deity? Now nothing remains but to prove that this Deity has a care or rather that its only employment consists in regulating the present and future happiness of its creation. . . . Oh that this Deity were the soul of the universe, the spirit of universal, imperishable love! Indeed, I believe it is." "The Deity must be judged by us from attributes analogical to our situation." In a letter of June 11, 1811, he says God is "the existing power of existence." It is another word for the essence of the universe. True he makes use of expressions which would seem to contradict the above, but it seems to me that these should always be interpreted in the light of his more explicit utterances as already explained.

There was a kind of discrepancy between his interior thought and his exterior attitude. Apostle of reason though he was, he felt the necessity of appealing to other sources to quench the thirst for higher things. His fidelity to the doctrine of Locke, that all knowledge originates in the senses, did not allow him to proclaim this necessity. "Negateur d'un Dieu personnel dont les attributs seraient des reflets des pauvres attributs humains, il desirait pourtant pouvoir les supporter et les croire, mais cette obscure tendance, il ne sut on n'osa la traduire publiquement."[122] In his poetry where he lays bare his soul his belief in God is manifest. It is only when he argues that he would seem to be an atheist. This discrepancy

[122]Koszul: *La Jeunesse de Shelley*, p. 132.

looks like deceit, but it is not. It is honesty rather than duplicity. He advanced only those statements which he thought he could prove, which he could demonstrate by the aid of reason. "It does not," he writes, "prove the non-existence of a thing that it is not discoverable by reason; feeling here affords us sufficient proof. . . . Those who really feel the being of a God, have the best right to believe it."[123] (True he goes on to say that he does not feel the being of God, and must be content with reason; but by this he may mean that he does not feel the existence of the God of the Christians.)

After all, this position with regard to the proof of God's existence is not so very different from that of Newman. "Logic," says Newman, "does not really prove." It enables us to join issues with others . . . it verifies negatively.[124] Newman, contrary to Locke, would inject an element of volition into logic. "He does not, indeed, deny the possibility of demonstration; he often asserts it; but he holds that the demonstration will not in fact convince."[125] We have really to desert a logical ground and to take our stand upon instinct.

According to Shelley anything that could not be demonstrated should not be given to others as gospel truth.[126] Now, feelings cannot be demonstrated, and hence it is that one may feel one thing and at the same time see that the senses and even unaided reason show that the contrary is true. "Feelings do not look so well as reasonings on black and white." Later on he said that materialism "allows its disciples to talk and dispenses them from thinking."[127] The opposition which Shelley experienced forced him to argue.

When Shelley wrote *The Necessity of Atheism* he was at most only an agnostic. This word was first used by Huxley in 1859 and if it had been in use in 1811 it may be that Shelley's pamphlet *The Necessity of Atheism* would have had for

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[123]Letter to E. Hitchener, Oct. 26, 1811.
[124]*Grammar of Assent*, p. 264.
[125]Leslie Stephen: *The Utilitarians*, Vol. III, p. 496.
[126]*Ingpen*, p. 90.
[127]*Essay on Life.*

its title "The Necessity of Agnosticism." No doubt agnostics are often atheists, but they are not necessarily so. "A man may be an agnostic simply or an agnostic who is also an atheist. He may be a scientific materialist and no more, or he may combine atheism with his materialism; consequently while it would be unjust to class agnostics, materialists or pantheists as necessarily also atheists, it cannot be denied that atheism is clearly perceived to be implied in certain phases of all these systems. There are so many shades and gradations of thought by which one form of a philosophy merges into another, so much that is opinionative and personal woven into the various individual expositions of systems, that, to be impartially fair, each individual must be classed by himself as atheist or theist. Indeed more upon his own assertion or direct teaching than by reason of any supposed implication in the system he advocates must this classification be made. The agnostic may be a theist if he admits the existence of a being behind and beyond nature even while he asserts that such a being is both unprovable and unknowable."[128]

With regard to the sources of Shelley's views on religion there is considerable difference of opinion. S. Bernthsen maintains that nothing contributed so much to the development of his genius and of his world-view as Spinoza's philosophy.[129] Professor Dowden, on the other hand, holds that although Shelley worked at a translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* several times, still "we find no evidence that he received in youth any adequate or profound impression, as Goethe did, from the purest and loveliest spirit among philosophical seekers after God. Of far greater influence with Shelley than Spinoza or Kant were those arrogant

[128] *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. II.

[129] "Doch ist vielleicht nichts für die Gestaltung seines eigenartigen Genius und für die Richtung seiner poetischen Weltauschauung von so ma geliender bedeutung gewesen, wie die Philosophie Spinoza's."

thinkers who prepared the soil of France for the ploughshare of revolution."[130] And Helen Richter in two articles in *English Studies*, vol. 30, shows that some of the quotations from Shelley used by Miss Bernthsen may be traced to other sources besides Spinoza.

Shelley's notions on belief can be traced to Locke and not to Spinoza. In the first book of the *Essay* concerning the human understanding, Locke attempts to prove that there are no innate ideas. To the objection that the universal acceptance of certain principles is proof of their innateness, he replies that no principles are universally accepted. You cannot point to one principle of morality, he says, that is accepted by all peoples. Standards of morality differ in different nations and at different times. How then are our ideas acquired? The second book of the *Essay* is devoted to showing that they originate in experience. Experience, Locke teaches, is twofold: *Sensation,* or the perception of external phenomena; and *Reflection,* or the perception of the internal phenomena, that is, of the activity of the understanding itself. These two are the sources of all our ideas. In the *Essay,* II, 1-2, we read: "All ideas come from sensation and reflection. . . . Whence has it (mind) all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer in one word, from experience; on that all our knowledge is founded and from that it ultimately derives itself." In Book IV, 2, Locke says: "Rational knowledge is the perception of the connection and agreement or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas. . . . Probability is the appearance of agreement upon fallible proofs. . . . The entertainment the mind gives this sort of proposition is called *belief,* assent, or opinion."

In his notes to *Queen Mab,* Shelley writes: "When a proposition is offered to the mind, it perceives the agreement or disagreement of the ideas of which it is composed. A perception of their agreement is termed *belief.* . . . Belief then is a

[130] *Dowden's Life,* Vol. I, p. 330.

passion the strength of which, like every other passion, is in precise proportion to the degrees of excitement. The degrees of excitement are three. The senses are the sources of all knowledge to the mind; consequently their evidence claims the strongest assent. The decision of the mind founded upon our experience, derived from these sources, claims the next degree. The experience of others which addresses itself to the former one, occupies the lowest degree." This reminds one of Locke's division of knowledge into three parts—intuitive, demonstrative, and sensitive.

In the same note to *Queen Mab,* Shelley says: "The mind is *active* in the investigation in order to perfect the state of perception of the relation which the component ideas of the proposition bear to each, which is *passive.*" And in Locke, II, 22, we read: "The mind in respect of its simple ideas is wholly *passive* and receives them all from the experience and operations of things. . . . The origin of *mixed modes* is, however, quite different. The mind often exercises an *active* power in making these several combinations called notions."

According to Spinoza, judgment, perception, and volition are one and the same thing. "At singularis volitio et idea unum et idem sunt."[131] Shelley, on the other hand, says that many falsely imagine "that belief is an act of volition in consequence of which it may be regulated by the mind."[132] Here we find reflected the philosophical ideas of Sir William Drummond, in whose *Academical Questions,* Shelley writes, "the most clear and vigorous statement of the intellectual system is to be found."[133]

According to Drummond, reasoning is entirely independent of volition. No man pretends that he can choose whether he shall feel or not. It is not because the mind previously wills it that one association of ideas gives place to another. It is because the new ideas excite that attention which the old no

[131] *Ethics.* II.
[132] *Notes to Queen Mab.*
[133] *Essay on Life,* ed. by Mrs. Shelley, Vol. I, p. 226.

longer employ. Trains of ideas may be always referred to one principal idea. "Whatever be the state of the soul, we always find it to result from some one prevailing sentiment, or idea, which determines the association of our thoughts and directs for a time the course which they take."[134] We are impelled to action by the influence of the stronger motive. In his letter to Lord Ellenborough, Shelley holds that "belief and disbelief are utterly distinct from and unconnected with volition. They are the apprehension of the agreement or disagreement of the ideas which compose any proposition. Belief is an involuntary operation of the mind, and, like other passions, its intensity is purely proportionate to the degrees of excitement."[135] There is no certainty that Shelley was acquainted with the works of Spinoza when he wrote *Queen Mab*. It is likely that he obtained his Spinozan views from William Drummond.

"It is necessary to prove," Shelley wrote, "that it (the universe) was created; until that is clearly demonstrated we may reasonably suppose that it has endured from all eternity. . . . It is easier to suppose that the universe has existed from all eternity than to conceive a being (beyond its limits) capable of creating it."[136] Again in his *Essay* on a future state: "But let thought be considered as some peculiar substance which permeates, and is the cause of, the animation of living things. Why should that substance be assumed to be something essentially distinct from all others and exempt from subjection to those laws from which no other substance is exempt." To Shelley everything was God.

> Spirit of Nature! here!
> In this interminable wilderness
> Of worlds, at whose immensity
> Even soaring fancy staggers
> Here is thy flitting temple.

[134] P. 17, *Academical Questions*.
[135] *Ingpen*. Vol. I, p. 327.
[136] *Notes to Queen Mab*.

Yet not the slightest leaf
That quivers to the breeze
Is less instinct with thee;
Yet not the meanest worm
That lurks in graves and fattens on the dead
Less shares thy eternal breath.[137]

With Spinoza, Drummond maintains that two substances having different attributes can have nothing in common between them; and that there cannot be two or more substances of the same nature. Infinite, immaterial, eternal, substance has nothing in common with substance which is material, finite, and perishable. How is it possible, then, that the former produced the latter? "An immaterial substance is necessarily without extension, or solidity, and never could have bestowed what it never possessed. God is infinite and consequently his substance is the sole, universal and eternal substance. Of this eternal substance there are two modifications—mind and extension. Human mind is part of the infinite mind of God. By body is meant the mode which expresses the essence of God, inasmuch as it is contemplated as extended substance, in a certain limited way, consequently though we do not call the Deity corporeal, as that would express what is finite, yet we say that all extended substance is contained in God, since extension and mind are the eternal attributes of his essence."[138]

Matter moves and acts according to its own laws; it preserves what we term the fair order of the universe, and it guides the motions of those worlds that are constituted out of it, by the properties which are inherent in it. "Why then should we not say that it feels, thinks and reasons in man. Thoughts and sentiments proceed from peculiar distributions of atoms in the human brain." The same necessity which gives us a peculiar form and constitution also gives us a

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[137] *Queen Mab.*
[138] *Academical Questions*, p. 241.

peculiar disposition and character. From these observations we may conclude with certainty that all bodies are capable of being affected by attraction and repulsion, of making combinations, of suffering dissolution, and that they always strive to persevere in that state in which they are while it is suitable to them."[139]

Shelley has the same thought:

> Throughout this varied and eternal world
> Soul is the only element; the block
> That for uncounted ages has remained
> The moveless pillar of a mountain's weight
> Is active living spirit. Every grain
> Is sentient both in unity and part
> And the minutest atom comprehends
> A world of loves and hatreds.[140]

Again in a letter to Miss Hitchener, November 24, 1811: "Yet that flower has a soul; for what is soul but that which makes an organized being to be what it is? . . . I will say then that all nature is animated; that microscopic vision, as it has discovered to us millions of animated beings, so might it, if extended, find that nature itself was but a mass of organized animation."

Southey told Shelley that he was a pantheist and not an atheist. He (Southey) says: "I ought not to call myself an atheist, since in reality I believe that the universe is God." "Pantheism in its narrower and proper philosophic sense is any system which expressly (not merely by implication) regards the finite world as simply a mode, limitation, part or aspect of the one eternal being; and of such a nature, that from the standpoint of this Being no distinct existence can be attributed to it."[141] In so far as Shelley gives to nature the attributes of God he is a pantheist. This he often does. Thus, in *Julian and Maddalo,* "sacred nature"; in *The Revolt of*

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[139] *Academical Questions*, p. 258.
[140] *Queen Mab*, IV, p. 15.
[141] Baldwin, J. M.: *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology*, 1902.

Islam, V, II, "dread nature"; and in the *Refutation of Deism* he speaks of "divine nature." Often though he distinguishes between God and Nature; and in this respect differs from Spinoza and those who are pantheists in the stricter use of the term. Thus in *The Revolt of Islam,* IX, 14, "by God and nature and necessity."

There is another difference between the pantheism of Shelley and that of Spinoza. Shelley does not make any difference between men, animals and plants. They are all about on the same level. Spinoza on the other hand makes man the king and center of the Universe.

Shelley may have gotten his pantheistic views from Volney and Holbach as well as from Drummond. In the *Systeme de la Nature,* II, c. VI, we read: "Tout nous pronne donc que ce n'est pas hors de la nature que nous devons chercher la Divinite. Quand nous voudrons en avoir une idée, disons que la nature est Dieu."

A characteristic of his later pantheism is that it identifies God with love. "Great Spirit, deepest love! Which rulest and dost move all things which live and are."[142] Again, "O Power! . . . thou which interpenetratest all things and without which this glorious world were a blind and formless chaos, Love, author of good, God, King, Father."[143]

Plato mounts up from sensuous love to intellecual love, and so does Shelley. In the *Defence of Poetry,* III, s. 125, he shows us how another great poet accomplished this. "His (Dante's) apotheosis of Beatrice in Paradise and the gradations of his own love and her loveliness, by which as by steps he feigns himself to have ascended to the throne of the Supreme cause, is the most glorious imagination of modern poetry." One would be in this highest stage, according to Spinoza, when one has attained the intellectual love of God. "This intellectual love of God is the highest kind of virtue

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[142] *Ode to Naples,* Epode II. B.
[143] *Colisseum,* III, 6.

and it not only makes man free, but it confers immortality."[144]

Shelly makes all things love one another. Thus in *Adonais:*

> All baser things pant with life's sacred thirst;
> Diffuse themselves; and spend in love's delight,
> The beauty and the joy of their renewed might (st. 19).

This harmonizes with his earlier views concerning inanimate objects. We saw he believed that they all had life, that they were all possessed of the "Spirit of Nature." In *Prometheus Unbound* he speaks of "this true, fair world of things a sea reflecting love." Love draws man to man. It is the *sine qua non* of man's existence. His love is founded in beauty as perceived by the senses. The Spirit of Beauty and the Spirit of Love are one.

> Great Spirit, *deepest Love!*
> Which rulest and dost move
> All things which live and are
> . . . Who sittest in thy star o'er Ocean's western floor
> Spirit of Beauty.[145]

We love that which is beautiful. "Love is a going out of one's own nature, or an identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person not our own."[146] The beauty of the world leads us step by step to the love of pure Beauty, Love itself. In the *Symposium,* Diotima explains how the love of beautiful objects leads on to the conception of perfect abstract beauty, "eternal unproduced, indestructible. . . . All other things are beautiful through a participation of it . . . When any one ascending from the correct system of Love begins to contemplate this supreme beauty he already touches the consummation of his labor."[147] The earth is not Beauty, Love, Divinity itself; it is but the shadow of God.

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[144]Turner: *History of Philosophy,* p. 483.
[145]*Ode to Naples,* Epode II, B.
[146]*Def. of Poetry,* III, 3.
[147]Forman's ed. *Prose Works,* Vol. III, p. 219.

How glorious are thou, Earth! And if thou be
The shadow of some spirit lovelier still.[148]

Again

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats unseen amongst us.[149]

This reminds us of platonism. The "Spirit" is the Idea, and the "shadow" is the earth. Plato's Idea transcends the world of concrete existence. The two functions of the Idea are to cause things to be known and to constitute their reality. It is at the same time one and many.[150] It stood out most prominently in the mind of Plato as the Idea of Good or Beauty by which he meant God Himself. He says that the shadow of the power of intellectual Beauty inspires us and not intellectual Beauty itself. We could not endure that. Intellectual Beauty is God.

Since then Shelley's Great Spirit, Spirit of Nature, Light, Beauty, Love, resembles the "Ideas" of Plato very closely, and since these Ideas have been identified by St. Augustine and other Christian platonists with the "mind of God," it is doubtful that Shelley was an atheist in the strict sense of the term. His poetry at least will tend to imbue us with a realization of God's Presence.

That Light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea.
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst; now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.[151]

In his later years Shelley became more and more of an idealist. Towards the beginning of 1812 he became acquainted

[148] *Prom. Unbound*, Act. II. sc. 3, p. 267.
[149] *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty.*
[150] *Turner.* p. 102.
[151] *Adonais*, st. 54.

with Berkeley's writings at the instance of Southey. Ideas, according to Berkeley, are communicated to the mind through the immediate operation of the Deity without the intervention of any actual matter. All our ideas are words which God speaks to us. Matter is only a perception of the mind.

> ———this Whole
> Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
> With all the silent or tempestuous workings
> By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
> Is but a vision; all that it inhabits
> Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;
> Thought is its cradle and its grave, nor less
> The future and the past are idle shadows
> Of thoughts eternal flight—they have no being:
> Nought is but that which feels itself to be.[152]

When Panthea, in *Prometheus Unbound,* describes to Asia a mysterious dream, suddenly Asia sees another shape pass between her and the "golden dew" which gleams through its substance. "What is it?" she asks. "It is mine other dream," replies Panthea. "It disappears," exclaims Asia. "It passes now into my mind," replies Panthea. To Shelley dreams are as visible as the dreamers, and our minds are simply a collection of dreams. Reality is reduced to the unsubstantiality of a dream, and dreams are the only reality.

With regard to his belief in the immortality of the soul, we have the same difficulty and the same solution. All that we see or know, he says, perishes, and although life and thought differ from everything else, still this distinction does not afford us any proof that it survives that period beyond which we have no experience of its existence. The quotations, though, which can be twisted into an expression of disbelief in the immortality of the soul[153] are less numerous than those expressing disbelief in the existence of God. His writings teem with expressions of belief in existence after death. "You have

[152] *Hellas.*

[153] Cf. Shelley's *Essay on a Future State.*

witnessed one suspension of intellect in dreamless sleep . . . you witness another in death. From the first, you well know that you cannot infer any diminution of intellectual force. How contrary then to all analogy to infer annihilation from death."[154] Again, "Whatever may be his true and final destination there is a spirit within him at enmity with nothing and dissolution."[155]

Plato claimed that the soul preexisted long before it was united to the body. In its supercelestial home "the soul enjoyed a clear and unclouded vision of ideas; and that, although it fell from that happy state and was steeped in the river of forgetfulness it still retains an indistinct memory of those heavenly intuitions of the truth."[156] Shelley was so impressed with the truth of this theory that he once walked up to a woman who was carrying a child in her arms and asked her if her child would tell them anything about preexistence. He believed that after death the soul returns to Plato's world of Ideas whence it came.

> Whilst burning through the inmost veil of heaven
> The soul of Adonais, like a star
> Beacons from the abode where the eternal are.[157]

As to the nature of the soul his early views reflect the influence of Dr. G. Aberthney, who believed in a kind of universal animism. On January 6, 1811, he writes to Hogg: "I think we may not inaptly define *soul* as the most supreme, superior and distinguished abstract appendage to the nature of anything." Again, "I conceive (and as is certainly capable of demonstration) that nothing can be annihilated, but that everything appertaining to nature, consisting of constituent parts infinitely divisible, is in a continual change, then do I suppose—and I think I have a right to draw this inference—that neither will soul perish."[158]

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[154] Letter to Eliz. Hitchener, June 25, 1811.
[155] *Essay on Life.*
[156] Turner: *History of Philosophy*, p. 110.
[157] *Adonais*, st. 55.
[158] June 20, 1811.

In *Queen Mab* we find Shelley believing in the doctrine of necessity. There he denies the freedom of the will. Later on he exempted the will from the law of necessity, but not the intelligence or reason of man. His views on this subject were derived principally from Godwin. "Every human being," says Godwin, "is irresistably impelled to act precisely as he does act. In the eternity which preceded his birth a chain of causes was generated, which, operating under the name of motives, make it impossible that any thought of his mind and any action of his life should be otherwise than it is."[159]

The actions of every human being are determined by the dictates of reason; and, like the operations of nature, are subject to the law of necessity. This idea of necessity is obtained from our experience of the uniformity of the phenomena of nature. Similar causes invariably produce the same effect. In the material world an immense chain of causes and effects appears, the connection between which we cannot understand. The same thing is true of the moral world. There, motive is to voluntary action what cause is to effect in the physical order. A man cannot resist the strongest motive any more than a stone left unsuspended can remain in the air. Will is simply an act of the judgment determined by logical impressions. The murderer is no more responsible for his deed than the knife with which the crime was committed. Both were set in motion from without; the knife, by material impulse; the man, by inducement and persuasion. To hate a murderer, then, is as unreasonable as to hate his weapon. Educate him, but do not punish. In the material world

> No atom of this turbulence fulfills
> A vague and unnecessitated chance,
> Or acts but as it must and ought to act.[160]

In the same way

> Not a thought, a will, an act,
> No working of the tyrant's moody mind,

[159] *Political Justice*, Book VI. 11.
[160] *Queen Mab*, Canto VI, p. 24.

Nor one misgiving of the slaves who boast
Their servitude, to hide the shame they feel,
Nor the events enchaining every will,
That from the depths of unrecorded time
Have drawn all-influencing virtue, pass
Unrecognized, or unforeseen by thee,
Soul of the Universe![161]

In his notes to *Queen Mab*, Shelley admits that the doctrine of necessity tends to introduce a great change into the established notions of morality, and utterly to destroy Religion. It teaches that no event could happen but as it did happen; and that if God is the author of good He is also the author of evil.

Shelley soon broke away from the teaching of Godwin and Spinoza with regard to the freedom of the will. He maintained that the will is unrestrainedly free and that man is his own master. Thus, "Man whose will has power when all beside is gone" (*The Revolt,* VIII, 16). "Such intent as renovates the world a will omnipotent" (Ibid., II, 41). "Who if ye dared might not aspire less than ye conceive of power" (Ibid., XI, 16).

Man can obtain freedom if he really desires it. Godwin held that freedom from external restraints leads to freedom of the mind, whereas Shelley sees in external political freedom the blossoming forth of already obtained freedom of the soul. The interior freedom is obtained through self-abnegation and the determination of the will. Mrs. Shelley says in the introduction to *Prometheus Unbound* that Shelley believed mankind had only to will that there should be no evil and there would be none. Evil is not something inherent in creation, but an accident that may be expelled. "But we are taught," writes Shelley, "by the doctrine of necessity, that there is neither good nor evil in the universe, otherwise than as the events to which we apply these epithets have relation to our own peculiar mode of being."[162]

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[161]Ibid.
[162]Notes to *Queen Mab.*

This view is very similar to that of Drummond. He held that order and disorder have no place but in our own imagination, and are the modes in which we survey the eternal and necessary series of things. Ideas of right and wrong depend upon the circumstances in which people are placed. They vary so much that we do not find the standard of morality to be precisely the same in any two countries of the world. Good and evil are modes of thinking; and what appears good to one person may appear bad to another, and neither good nor bad to a third. This is Spinoza's doctrine: "Bonum et malum quod attinet, nihil etiam positivum in rebus, in se scilicet consideratis, indicant, nec aliud sunt praeter cogitandi modos, seu motiones, quas formamus ex eo, quod res ad invicem comparamus nam una eademque res potest eodem tempore bona et mala, et etiam indifferens esse." *Ethics,* IV.

Shelley has two versions of the origin of good and evil. The first is manichean and represents them as twin genii of balanced power and opposite tendencies ruling the world. "This much is certain: that Jesus Christ represents God as the fountain of all goodness, the eternal enemy of pain and evil. . . . According to Jesus Christ, and according to the indisputable facts of the case, some evil spirit has dominion in this imperfect world."[163] Good is represented by the morning star and evil by a comet. According to the second version, which is Shelley's own view, evil has not the same power that good has, and came later into the world. Evil is strong because man permits it to exist, and must disappear as soon as man wills this. Since it could be entirely eliminated, it is not an integral part of the world.

Man is naturally good. His vices are the result of bad education. They are nothing but errors of judgment. Let truth prevail; educate men properly, and then vice will entirely disappear. Shelley also writes:

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[163] *Shelley Memorials, Essay on Christianity,* p. 283.

Let priest-led slaves cease to proclaim that man
Inherits vice and misery, when force
And falsehood hang even over the cradled babe
Stifling with rudest grasp all natural good.

Godwin thinks that the influence of the emotions and passions has been overestimated. It is not true that they can force one to act in opposition to the dictates of one's reason. They maintain their hold on men but by the ornaments with which they are decked out; and these are the things which compel a man to yield. Reduce sensual acts to their true nakedness and they would be despised. Whatever power the passions have to incline men to act will, in future, be offset by consideration of justice and self-interest. Many have overcome the influence of pain and pleasure in the past by the energies of intellectual resolution, and what these accomplished can be done by all. Reason and truth, then, are sufficient to change the whole complexion of society. They will ultimately prevail; and then all will be wise and good. The following from Shelley is an echo of this.

And when reason's voice
Loud as the voice of nature shall have waked
The nations; and mankind perceive that vice
Is discord, war, and misery; that virtue
Is peace and happiness and harmony

XX

How sweet a scene will earth become!
Of purest spirits a pure dwelling-place,
Symphonious with the planetary spheres.

Godwin went so far as to say that eventually all sickness would disappear; and even in this Shelley follows his master. Shelley finds this view of evil in the teaching of Christ. "According to Jesus Christ," he writes, "some evil spirit has dominion in this imperfect world. But there will come a time

when the human mind shall be visited exclusively by the influence of the benignant power."[164]

All the philosophists who influenced Shelley agreed in this that virtue leads to happiness. The purpose of virtuous conduct, says Godwin, "is the production of happiness." So with Shelley "virtue is peace, and happiness, and harmony." Virtue, says Godwin, is the offspring of the understanding; and vice is always the result of narrow views. "Selfishness," writes Shelley, "is the offspring of ignorance and mistake; . . . disinterested benevolence is the product of a cultivated imagination, and has an intimate connection with all the arts which add ornament or dignity or power, or stability to the social state of man."[165]

Shelley does not believe in the existence of hell. He thinks that this doctrine is incompatible with the goodness of God. "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, that ye may be the sons of your Heavenly Father, Who makes the sun to shine on the good and the evil, and the rain to fall on the just and unjust." How monstrous a calumny have not impostors dared to advance against the mild and gentle author of this just sentiment, and against the whole tenor of his doctrines and his life overflowing with benevolence and forbearance and compassion."[166] God, he says, would only be gratifying his revenge under pretence of satisfying justice were he to inflict pain upon another for no better reason than that he deserved it.

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[164] *Essay on Christianity.*
[165] *Speculations on Morals,* Vol. II, prose works, p. 260.
[166] *Shelley Memorials. Essay on Christianity,* p. 279.

CHAPTER V

RADICALISM IN CONTEMPORARY POETRY

A poet is the product of his time. Shelley observes that there is a resemblance, which does not depend on their own will, between the writers of any particular age. They are all subjected to a common influence "which arises out of a combination of circumstances belonging to the time in which they live, though each is in a degree the author of the very influence by which his being is thus pervaded." Hence it is that the works of any poet cannot be thoroughly appreciated unless the spirit that pervaded the life of the period be understood. This is particularly true of the poetry of Shelley. It embodies the aspirations and ideals of the philosophers of his time. Its themes are liberty, justice and revolt. On every side are heard protests against conventionality, against government, and against religion. The philosophers of the French Revolution are hailed as the saviors of society and their theories put forth as a panacea for all human ills. Shelley is the high water mark of the waves of revolt which threatened to inundate the country. A brief investigation, then, of the poetical atmosphere of the end of the eighteenth century will help us in our study of the sources of his radicalism.

There can be no doubt but contemporary literature had some influence on his sensitive nature. "The writings of the future laureate (Southey) as likewise of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and Landor's *Gehir* were among those for which Shelley in early youth had a particular predilection."[167] Since the influence of Southey soon began to decline on account of his fulsome praise of George III, we shall confine our attention to Wordsworth and Coleridge. "One word in candor," Shelley writes, "on the manner in which the study of contemporary writing may have modified my composition. I am intimately

[167]W. M. Rossetti: *Memoir of Shelley*, p. 33.

persuaded that the peculiar style of intensive and comprehensive imagery in poetry which distinguishes modern writers has not been as a general power the product of the imitation of any particular one. It is impossible that any one contemporary with such writers (Wordsworth and Coleridge were specified at first) as stand in the front ranks of literature of the present day can conscientiously assure themselves or others that their *language* and *tone of thought* may not have been modified by the study of the productions of these extraordinary intellects."[168]

Radicalism, we said, was the characteristic of this period and this extended both to the form and the matter of poetry. Byron characterizes one eminent poet as "the mild apostate from poetic rule."[169]

During the greater part of the eighteenth century conservatism and classicism were in the ascendant. After the Revolution of 1688 everything medieval and Catholic was looked upon with suspicion. Old customs and festivities were allowed to fall into disuse. Compared with the past it was a material age. In the early part of the century agriculture and commerce flourished and with this advance in material prosperity came the decline of romanticism. "Correctness" in form and thought is the guiding light of prince and peasant, of poet and philosopher. Imagination is concerned almost entirely with society and fine manners. Pope's themes are beaux and belles, pomatum, billets-doux, and patches. He preferred the artificial to the natural. Form, imitation of the classics, is to him and the men of that period, the all important matter in literature. In his *Essay on Criticism* he tells us again and again

> Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem
> To copy nature is to copy them.

"To his immediate successors Pope was the grand exemplar

[168] Shelley's notebook. Printed for W. K. Bixby, St. Louis, 1911.
[169] *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers.*

of what a poet should be,"[170] but unfortunately he was followed by a horde of imitators whose only claim on the muse of poetry was ability to turn out heroic couplets. As a consequence poetry became a cold, lifeless affair, devoid of imagination and "divorced from living nature and the warm spontaneity of the heart."[171]

A reaction against this pseudo-classicism was inevitable. That small but constantly flowing stream of romanticism which is found in the works of Thomson, Blake, Warton and Gray, increased in size until it broke loose in the *Lyrical Ballads* of 1798. This was the joint work of Coleridge and Wordsworth. The two poets met for the first time in 1796. Coleridge was then 24 years of age and Wordsworth but two years his senior. In July, 1797, Wordsworth and his sister moved to Alfoxden, in Somersetshire, that they might be near Coleridge, who was living with his wife at Nether-Stowey. They were, as Coleridge has said somewhere, three people but one soul. A good description of the relationship between them is given in Dorothy Wordsworth's *Alfoxden Journal,* and in Coleridge's *The Nightingale;* a conversation poem. Their most frequent topic of conversation was "the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination."[172] From these conversations originated the plan of the *Lyrical Ballads.* The work was divided into two parts. Coleridge was to direct his attention to romantic and supernatural characters and to enshroud these with a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to engage our interest and attention. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to produce the same effect by giving the charm of novelty to objects chosen from ordinary life. It seemed to them that the beauty of a landscape often

[170]P. J. Lennox in the *Catholic Encylopedia*, Vol. XII.
[171]T. Arnold; *Manual of English Literature*, p. 304.
[172]Coleridge: *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. XIV.

depended on the accidents of light and shade; that moonlight or sunset sometimes transformed an uninviting scene into one of entrancing beauty; and so they believed that they could diffuse the glow of their imagination over any object and make it attractive. As might be expected the publication of the *Ballads* did not meet with success. The change from the stereotyped verse of the age to these carelessly formed effusions was too much for the critics. Some scoffed at them; others thought they were being hoaxed. The subjects dealt with in these poems were long considered as unfit for poetry; and of course the conservative felt it his bounden duty to protest against the innovation. In the second edition of the *Ballads,* which was entirely Wordsworth's own work, an attempt is made to justify this radical departure from the beaten path. A poet, he explains, is a genius, and should not be hampered by any conventions of art or traditions of society. His imagination is the purifying fire which transmutes the rough ore of the commonplace into the choice gold of literature. "Good poetry," he writes, "is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings." "He (the poet) is a man speaking to men; a man, it is true, endowed with more lively sensibility, more enthusiasm and tenderness, who has a greater knowledge of human nature and a more comprehensive soul, than are supposed to be common among mankind; a man pleased with his own passions and volitions, and who rejoices more than other men in the spirit of life that is in him; delighting to contemplate similar volitions and passions as manifested in the goings of the universe, and habitually impelled to create them where he does not find them."[173] This is a good picture of Shelley. "With a spiritual gaze turned first inward, on his own passions and volitions, and then turned outward upon the universe, Shelley looked in vain for external objects answering to the forms generated by his dazzling imagination."[174]

[173] Preface to *Lyrical Ballads.*
[174] *Courthope,* Vol., VI, p. 314.

Meter and poetic diction, Wordsworth says, are something altogether accidental to poetry, and consequently there is no essential difference between the language of poetry and that of prose. "The distinction," Shelley writes, "between poets and prose writers is a vulgar error. Plato was essentially a poet."[175] Wordsworth contends, too, that the proper language of poetry is the ordinary language of the rustic. The excellence of poetry depends not so much on the dignity of the words used as on their capacity to arouse emotions. "The language of poets," Shelley writes, "is vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before-unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension; until words which represent them, become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thought instead of pictures of integral thoughts. . . . Every original language near to its source is in itself the chaos of a cyclic poem."[176]

Not only Shelley's principles as regards "the use of language" but also his "tone of thought" was influenced by Wordsworth. Coleridge and Wordsworth removed the sphere of poetry from social action to philosophical reflection; they exchanged the ancient method, consisting in the ideal imitation of external objects, for an introspective analysis of the impressions of the individual mind.[177] Many of Wordsworth's poems are records of the moods of his own soul, and of phases of his life; so also are Shelley's A brief examination of some of Wordsworth's works will serve to make this clear.

Wordsworth planned an epic poem, *The Recluse,* of which *The Prelude,* or introduction, and *The Excursion* are the only parts extant. In these two poems we can trace out the history of his radicalism. *The Prelude* is his autobiography; and *The Excursion* supplements what is lacking to a thorough revelation of the workings of his mind. He begins *The Prelude* by

[175]Shelley's *Defence of Poetry,* p. 9.
[176]Shelley's *Defence of Poetry,* p. 5.
[177]Courthope: *History of Poetry,* Vol. VI, p. 192.

telling about his childhood and schooltime, his residence at Cambridge, vacation and love for books. He then treats of his first trip to the Continent and his residence in London. Book IX is concerned with his second visit to France in 1791. While there he mixed up with all classes

> . . . and thus ere long
> Became a patriot; and my heart was all
> Given to the people, and my love was theirs."[178]

It was natural for him to do so, because he lived from boyhood among those whose claims on one's respect did not rest on accidents of wealth or blood. He describes his friend General Beaupis, who inoculated him with enthusiasm for the cause of the Revolution. In *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley describes Dr. Lind, who taught him to curse the king. Hatred of absolute rule, where the will of one is law for all, was becoming stronger in Wordsworth every day. After the September massacres and the imprisonment of the king he returned to Paris.

> And ranged with ardor heretofore unfelt
> The spacious city.[179]

He was about to cast in his lot with the Revolutionists when he was forced to return to England. The excesses of the Revolution, however, deprived him of some of the hopes that he placed in it. At that time his "day thoughts" were most melancholy. When news came of the fall of Robespierre his hopes began to revive. The earth will now march firmly towards righteousness and peace.

> Oh! pleasant exercise of hope and joy!
> For mighty were the auxiliars which then stood
> Upon our side, us who were strong in love;
> Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,
> But to be young was very Heaven.[180]

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[178] *Riverside Edition*, p. 217.
[179] Ibid., p. 239.
[180] Ibid., Book XI, p. 265.

In Canto V of *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley describes how oppressors and oppressed are persuaded to forego revenge. Love has conquered and a new era of peace and happiness is about to begin.

> To hear, to see, to live, was on that morn
> Lethean joy.

Although Shelley does not dwell on details as Wordsworth does, still there is a striking similarity between the spirit of parts of *The Excursion* and that of many of Shelley's poems. An extract from *The Revolt of Islam* will help to verify this.

> Thoughts of great deeds were mine, dear friend, when first
> The clouds that wrapt me from this world did pass.
> I do remember well the hour which burst
> My spirit's sleep. A fresh May-dawn it was,
> When I walked forth upon the glittering grass,
> And wept, I know not why; until there rose
> From the near schoolroom voices that, alas!
> Were but one echo from a world of woes,
> The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes.
>
> And then I clasped my hands and looked around—
> But none was near to mock my streaming eyes,
> Which poured their drops upon the sunny ground—
> So without shame I spoke: "I will be wise,
> And just, and free, and mild, if in me lies
> Such power, for I grow weary to behold
> The selfish and the strong still tyrannize
> Without reproach or check.

Wordsworth's joy, however, was short-lived. In 1796 Napoleon started on a campaign of conquest and this completely shattered Wordsworth's faith in the Revolution. When he saw that the French were changing a war of self-defense into one of subjugation, losing sight of all which they themselves had struggled for, he became "vexed with anger and sore with disappointment." About the year 1793 he fell under the influence of Godwin, and it is to his doctrines that he now turned for solace. Godwin, as we have seen, makes reason the

sole guide and rule of conduct. Custom, law, and every kind of authority are inimical to the well-being of humanity. Wordsworth then at this time began dragging all precepts, creeds, etc., "like culprits to the bar of reason, now believing, now disbelieving,"

> till, demanding formal proof
> And seeking it in everything, I lost
> All feeling of conviction, and, in fine,
> Sick, wearied out with contrarieties,
> Yielded up all moral questions in despair.[181]

He had sounded radicalism to its lowest depths and found it wanting.

> I drooped
> Deeming our blessed reason of the least use
> Where wanted most.

In *The Prelude* Wordsworth records how he had in youth moments of supreme inspiration, and had taken vows binding himself to the service of the spirit he felt in nature.

> To the brim
> My heart was full, I made no vows but vows
> Were made for me; bond unknown to me
> Was given, that I should be, else sinning greatly
> A dedicated spirit.

So with Shelley in *Alastor:*

> Mother of this unfathomable world!
> Favor my solemn song! for I have loved
> Thee ever and thee only.

The sense of life and the sense of mystery are seen in *Alastor* and these are due to the influence of Wordsworth.

During all this time Wordsworth wrote very little poetry embodying his radical sentiments. The only important work of this kind which appeared is his drama, *The Borderers.* Even this cannot be called a radical word as it marks his re-

[181] *The Prelude*, Book XI, p. 272.

jection of Godwinism. Marmaduke loves Idonea, Herbert's daughter, and is told that she is about to be sacrificed by her father to the lust of a neighboring noble. Oswald, the Godwinian, persuades Marmaduke, by dint of reasoning, to disregard the musty command of tyrants, to obey the only law "that sense submits to recognize," and kill blind Herbert. This Marmaduke does, but later on finds out his mistake and tells Idonea towards the end that

> Proof after proof was pressed upon me; guilt
> Made evident, as seemed, by blacker guilt,
> Whose impious folds enwrapped even thee.[182]

He realizes that he has committed a crime; that it is the height of folly to ignore instinct and tradition, and so he wanders over waste and wild

> till anger is appeased
> In heaven, and mercy gives me leave to die.

Although the radicalism of his early years does not reveal itself to any great extent in his poetry of that time, still it is responsible for his largest work, *The Excursion*. This poem is an attempt to reconstruct a new theory of life out of the ruins of the French Revolution. According to Wordsworth, the poet is a teacher. "I wish," he says, "to be considered as a teacher or as nothing." Shelley says that "poets are the unacknowleged legislators of the world."[183] His *Revolt of Islam* and other poems attempt to inculcate "a liberal and comprehensive morality." What particularly distinguishes Wordsworth and Shelley from preceding poets is that they moralize and draw lessons from their own experiences. The two principal characters in *The Excursion*—the Solitary and the Wanderer—represent Wordsworth the radical and Wordsworth the conservative. The Wanderer, who has had a long experience of men and things, derives from nature moral reflections of various kinds. In his walks he meets the

[182] Act. V, scene 3.
[183] *Essay on Poetry*.

Solitary, a gloomy, morose sceptic. This man tells about his desire to find peace and contentment; his delight in nature; and the happiness of his wedded life. The death of his wife and children filled him with despair. He then begins to question the ways of God to men and exclaims

> Then my soul
> Turned inward—to examine of what stuff
> Times fetters are composed; and life was put
> To inquisition, long and profitless![184]

He is aroused from these abstractions by the report that the dread Bastile has fallen; and from the wreck he sees a golden palace rise

> The appointed seat of equitable law
> The mild paternal sway
> . . . from the blind mist issuing
> I beheld
> Glory, beyond all glory ever seen.

In *Queen Mab* Shelley has a somewhat similar phrase:

> Hope was seen beaming through the mists of fear.

He thus becomes interested once more in life; and joins in the chorus of Liberty singing in every grove.

> War shall cease
> Did ye not hear that conquest is abjured?
> Bring garlands, bring forth choicest flowers, to deck
> The tree of Liberty.[185]

Society then became his bride and "airy hopes" his children. Although no Gallic blood flows in his veins, still not less than Gallic zeal burns among "the sapless twigs of his exhausted heart." He is in entire sympathy with the plans and aspirations of the revolutionists, and he feels that a progeny of golden years is about to descend and bless mankind. All the hopes of the Solitary, though, are blasted. He is disgusted with the way in which the revolution is progressing and sets

[184] *The Excursion*, Book III, p. 107.
[185] Ibid., p. 108.

sail for America, where he expects to find freedom from the restraints of tyranny. Shelley writes about America as follows:

> There is a people mighty in its youth,
> A land beyond the oceans of the west
> Where, though with rudest rites, Freedom and Truth
> Are worshipped.[186]

The Solitary's expectations are not fulfilled, and so he returns, despondent, to his own country. He is in this frame of mind when he meets the Wanderer, who tells him that the only adequate support for the calamities of life is belief in Providence. Victory, the Wanderer says, is sure if we strive to yield entire submission to the law of conscience. He compares the force of gravity, which constrains the stars in their motions, to the principle of duty in the life of man. In Act IV of *Prometheus Unbound* Shelley compares the force of gravity to the impulse of love. There is no cause for despair, and "the loss of confidence in social man." The beginning of the revolution had raised man's hopes unwarrantably high. As there was no cause then for such exalted confidence, so there is none now for fixed despair.

> The two extremes are equally disowned
> By reason.

One should have patience and courage. It is folly to expect the accomplishment in one day of "what all the slowly moving years of time have left undone." In the preface to *The Revolt of Islam* Shelley writes: "But such a degree of unmingled good was expected (from the revolution) as it was impossible to realize. . . . Could they listen to the plea of reason who had groaned under the calamities of a social state according to the provisions of which one man riots in luxury whilst another famishes for want of bread? Can he who the day before was a trampled slave suddenly become liberal-minded? This

[186] *Revolt of Islam*, Canto XI, st. 22.

is the consequence of the habits of a state of society to be produced by resolute perseverance and indefatigable hope, and long-suffering and long-believing courage, and the systematic efforts of generations of men of intellect and virtue." The Wanderer exhorts the Solitary to engage in bodily exercise and to study nature. He contrasts the dignity of the imagination with the presumptuous littleness of certain modern philosophers. At this point the Solitary remarks that it is impossible for some to rise again; that the mind is not free. It is as vain to ask a man to resolve as bid a creature fly "whose very sorrow is that time hath shorn his natural wings." The Wanderer replies that the ways of restoration are manifold

> fashioned to the steps
> Of all infirmity, and tending all
> To the same point, attainable by all
> Peace in ourselves and union with our God.

The Wanderer calls upon the skies and hills to testify to the existence of God. Wordsworth the Wanderer finds an answer for Wordsworth the Solitary in Nature. He sees that there is a Living Spirit in Nature; a spirit which animates all things, from "the meanest flower that blows" to the glorious birth of sunshine; a spirit which pervades matter and gives to each its distinctive life and being. He sees God in everything.

> To every form of being is assigned
> An *active principle* . . .
> . . . from link to link
> It circulates the soul of all the worlds.[187]

Shelley, in a letter to Hogg, January 3, 1812, speaks about "the soul of the Universe, the intelligent and necessarily beneficent *actuating principle.*"

Wordsworth's treatment of nature is original in this that nature is no longer viewed as a garden or laboratory where man's processes are carried on, but she is recognized as being

[187] *The Excursion*, verse 15.

over and above him and penetrating his whole life by impulses that emanate from her. Wordsworth spiritualizes nature. He views her phenomena as so many "varying manifestations of one life sacred, great, and all-pervading. "This life of nature is felt more when man is alone with her and hence the love of solitude which marks the Wordsworthian habit of mind."[188] Other characteristics of Wordsworth besides the love for Nature's seclusion are "the reverence which sees in her a revelation of infinity and the recognition in her of a mysterious and poetic life." These are also characteristics of Shelley. His love of solitude is inspired by the desire to know nature in her inmost heart; "he has the same feeling for infinite expanse and the same perception of an underlying life." He also insists, like Wordsworth, on "the education of nature."

In the preface to *Alastor,* Shelley says that the subject of the poem represents a youth "led forth by an imagination inflamed and purified through familiarity with all that is excellent and majestic, to the contemplation of the universe. . . . The magnificence and beauty of the external world sinks profoundly into the frame of his conceptions and affords to their modifications a variety not to be exhausted." In the introductory stanzas, Shelley asks this great parent, Nature, to inspire him that his "strain may modulate with murmurs of the air." He tells us, too, "that every sight and sound from the vast earth and ambient air sent to his heart its choicest blessings." Wordsworth says, in *Lines on Tintern Abbey,* that

> Nature never did betray
> The heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life to lead
> From joy to joy; for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all

[188] L. Winstanley in *Englische Studien,* V. 34.

> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us or disturb
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings.

In the Prelude, Wordsworth speaks of the influence of nature as follows:

> Wisdom and spirit of the universe!
> That soul that art the eternity of thought,
> That givest to forms and images a breath
> And everlasting motion, not in vain
> By day or star-light thus from my first dawn
> Of childhood didst thou intertwine for me
> The passions that build up our human soul.

This and the *Intimations of Immortality* remind us of the following passage in *Queen Mab*:

> Soul of the Universe! eternal spring
> Of life and death, of happiness and woe,
> Of all that chequers the phantasmal scene
> That floats before our eyes in wavering light,
> Which gleams but on the darkness of our prison,
> Whose chains and massy walls
> We feel, but cannot see.

Wordsworth goes into the woods and hears a thousand notes all making sweet music, all in harmony. Furthermore, he feels that all living things, flowers and animals, are possessed of conscious life.

> And 'tis my faith that every flower
> Enjoys the air it breathes.
> (*Lines written in early spring.*)

Nature is throbbing not only with life but with the spirit of love, a spirit that knits the whole world of living things together.

> Love, now a universal birth,
> From heart to heart is stealing,
> From earth to man, from man to earth.
> (*To my sister.*)

The same thought runs through many of Shelley's poems. In *The Sensitive Plant* the flowers live, love, and die.

> But none ever trembled and panted with bliss
> In the garden, the field, or the wilderness,
> Like a doe in the noontide, with love's sweet want,
> As the companionless sensitive plant.

The beauty and loveliness of nature will do us more good "than all the sages can." They will inspire us as nothing else will.

Dr. Ackermann draws attention to the kindness of Wordsworth and Shelley for animals, and notes the similarity between the two following passages.[188] Thus Wordsworth in *The Excursion,* II, 41-47:

> Birds and beasts
> And the mute fish that glances in the stream
> And harmless reptile coiling in the sun
> . . . he loved them all:
> Their rights acknowledging he felt for all.

And Shelley in *Alastor,* 13-15:

> If no bright bird, insect, or gentle beast
> I consciously have injured, but still loved
> And cherished these my kindred.

Wordsworth concludes *The Excursion* and Shelley the *Alastor* with the desire for death.

With the name of Wordsworth, the name of that greater genius, Coleridge, will always be linked. Although they were life-long friends still no two could be more unlike in character and temperament. Wordsworth was moody and determined. He, like Shelley, worked out his plans unmindful of the opinion of others. Neglect and ridicule did not trouble him in the least. He was an excellent type of *mens sana in corpore sano.* Coleridge, on the other hand, was without ambition and steadiness of purpose. He drifted on through life in a listless manner, "sometimes committing a golden thought to the blank

[188] Quellen: *Vorbilder, Stoffe zu Shelley's Poetischen Werken.*

leaf of a book, or to a private letter, but generally content with oral communication."[190] At an early age he had accomplished great things and it was felt that these were but "the morning giving promise of a glorious day." He was scarcely thirty when he won distinction as a poet, journalist, lecturer, theologian, critic and philosopher. The "glorious day," however, never matured. Sickness and opium were the clouds that obscured the brightness of his genius. His married life was not a happy one. As in the case of Shelley, jealousy and irritation on the part of the wife, and disenchantment on the part of the husband made home-life intolerable.

One of the earliest manifestations of Coleridge's radicalism is his *Ode on the Destruction of the Bastile,* written in 1789. In it he rejoices at the overthrow of tyranny and the success of Freedom. Liberty with all her attendant virtues will now be the portion of all.

> Yes! Liberty the soul of life shall reign
> Shall throb in every pulse, shall flow thro' every vein!

He hopes that she will extend her influence wider and wider until every land shall boast "one independent soul." In his *Ode to France* he writes:

> With what deep worship I have still adored
> The spirit of divinest Liberty.

Shelley may have had this in mind when he wrote in *Alastor*

> And lofty hopes of divine liberty
> Thoughts the most dear to him.

Coleridge's most important radical work, which Lamb considered to be more than worthy of Milton, is *Religious Musings.* Shelley's *Queen Mab* bears so strong a resemblance to it that the *Religious Musings* has been called Coleridge's *Queen Mab.* In the first part he lashes his countrymen for joining the coalition against France under pretence of defending religion.

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[190] Jenkins: *Handbook of Literature,* p. 313.

Further on he gives his views on society, its origin and progress. It is to private property that we must attribute all the sore ills that desolate our mortal life. Unlike many radicals, however, Coleridge can see the good in an institution as well as the evil. Thus he holds that the rivalry resulting from our present economic condition has stimulated thought and action

> From avarice thus, from luxury and war,
> Sprang heavenly science; and from science freedom.

The innumerable multitude of wrongs, continues Coleridge, by man on man inflicted, cry to heaven for vengeance. Even now (1796) the storm begins which will cast to earth the rich, the great, and all the mighty men of the world. This will be followed by a period of sunshine, when Love will return and peace and happiness be the portion of all.

> As when a shepherd on a vernal morn
> Through some thick fog creeps timorous with slow foot,
> Darkling with earnest eyes he traces out
> The immediate road, all else of fairest kind
> Hid or deformed. But lo! the bursting Sun!
> Touched by the enchantment of that sudden beam
> Straight the black vapor melteth, and in globes
> Of dewy glitter gems each plant and tree;
> On every leaf, on every blade it hangs;
> And wide around the landscape streams with glory!

So we will fly into the sun of love, impartially view creation, and love it all. We will then see that God diffused through society makes it one whole; that every victorious murder is a blind suicide; that no one injures and is not uninjured. This change will be brought about by a return to pure Faith and meek Piety. He differs from Shelley in this, that he does not look for reformation through the overturning of thrones and churches. The existing frame-work of society is all right; it needs only to be freed from some of its barnacles.

The first stanza of Coleridge's *Love* reminds one of the fol-

lowing passage from Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (Act IV, 406):

> His will, with all mean passions, bad delights
> And selfish cares, its trembling satellites,
> A spirit ill to guide, but mighty to obey,
> Is as a tempest-winged ship, whose helm
> Love rules.

Coleridge's stanza runs as follows:

> All thoughts, all passions, all delights
> Whatever stirs this mortal frame
> All are but ministers of Love
> And feed his sacred flame.[191]

Shelley's sonnet to Ianthe is little more than a transposition of Coleridge's sonnet to his son. Shelley says:

> I love thee, Baby! for thine own sweet sake:
> Those azure eyes, that faintly dimpled cheek,
> Thy tender frame, so eloquently weak,
> Love in the sternest heart of hate might wake;
> But more when o'er thy fitful slumber bending
> Thy mother folds thee to her wakeful heart,
> Whilst love and pity, in her glances blending,
> All that thy passive eyes can feel impart:
> More, when some feeble lineaments of her,
> Who bore thy weight beneath her spotless bosom,
> As with deep love I read thy face, recur,—
> More dear art thou, O fair and fragile blossom;
> Dearest when most thy tender traits express
> The image of thy mother's loveliness.[192]

Coleridge's runs as follows:

> Charles! my slow heart was only sad when first
> I scanned that face of feeble infancy:
> For dimly on my thoughtful spirit burst
> All I had been, and all my child might be!
> But when I saw it on its mother's arm,
> And hanging at her bosom (she the while
> Bent o'er its features with a tearful smile),
> Then I was thrilled and melted, and most warm
> Impressed a father's kiss; and all beguiled

[191] Dowden's ed., p. 135.
[192] Dowden's *Life of Shelley*. Vol. I, p. 376.

Of dark remembrance and presageful fear,
I seemed to see an angel's form appear—
'Twas even thine, beloved woman mild!
So for the mother's sake the child was dear
And dearer was the mother for the child.

Coleridge and Shelley made a universal application of a few metaphysical principles acquired in their early years; and on them ground their political and religious views. Poetry, metaphysics, morals and politics mixed themselves forever in their imagination.[193]

[193]Courthope: *History of Poetry*, Vol. VI, p. 194.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The radical, when theorizing, considers man in the abstract. He forgets about actual conditions—man with his inequalities. The only thing necessary, in his view, for the reformation of society is to lay before mankind some logical plan of action. He loses sight of the fact that other influences, besides logic, play a part in the moulding of man's conduct. Newman says teach men to shoot around corners and then you may hope to convert them by means of syllogisms. "One feels," Emerson writes, "that these philosophers have skipped no fact but one, namely, life. They treat man as a plastic thing, or something that may be put up or down, ripened or retarded, molded, polished, made into solid or fluid or gas at the will of the leader."[194] The radical sees the millenium dawning upon the land every time a new scheme is proposed for the amelioration of society. They do not apply any tests to determine its adaptability to the needs of the people. It satisfies the rules of logic and for them this is sufficient. Burke considers this point in his speech, "On Conciliation with America." "It is a mistake to imagine that mankind follow up practically any speculative principle as far as it will go in argument and in logical illation. All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue and every prudent act is founded on compromise and barter. We balance inconveniences; we give and take; we remit some rights that we may enjoy others. Man acts from motives relative to his interests; and not on metaphysical speculations."

Shelley could not understand how it is that evils continue so pertinaciously to exist in society. He believed that men had but to will that there would be no evil and there would be none. It seemed to him that he could construct inside twenty-

[194] *Essay on Owen.*

four hours a system of government and morals that would be perfect. "The science," Burke writes, "of constructing a commonwealth, or renovating it, or reforming it, is, like every other experimental science not to be taught *a priori*. Nor is it a short experience that can instruct us in that practical science. . . . The science of government being therefore so practical in itself, and intended for such practical purposes, a matter which requires experience, and even more experience than any person can gain in his whole life, however sagacious and observing he may be, it is with infinite caution that any man ought to venture upon pulling down an edifice which has answered in any tolerable degree for ages the common purposes of society, or on building it up again without having models and patterns of approved utility before his eyes."[195]

The radical does not distinguish between essentials and non-essentials. He sees some evils in connection with an institution and forthwith would wipe that institution out of existence. Garrison thought there was something in the constitution of the United States that sanctioned slavery and so he described the constitution as "a league with death and a covenant with hell." As late as 1820 Shelley believed that "the system of society as it exists at present must be overthrown from the foundations with all its superstructures of maxims and of forms."[196] He sees the evil and misses the good. The radical and the conservative both sin in this, that they take the cause of their adversaries not by its strong end, but by its weakest.

Imaginative people see a few things clearly, and on that account do not see the whole. Their attention is entirely taken up with a few details. Shelley had no connected view of the world. He has brilliant, perhaps exaggerated, pictures of parts of it. He picks out some misery here and some injustice there, and condemns the whole. Again, he does not offer

[195] *Reflections*, Vol. V.

[196] *Letter to Leigh Hunt*, May 1, 1820.

a complete philosophy of life for us to follow. He takes a truth here and another there and deifies them, exaggerates them as he does pictures of the world. His thoughts were so vivid that they outshone the counsels of the more conservative. They impressed him so much that he could not see their limitations. Single views, a simple philosophy suited him. For this reason he made his guides and leaders those philosophers of the eighteenth century who discarded the tortuous philosophy of the past and put forward a simple recipe which was to bring light and happiness to the world.

Radicals do a great deal of good by shaking off our social torpor and disturbing our self-sufficient complacency. But they very often cause a great deal of harm, and then society has a perfect right to defend itself against them. If they ignore the past, if they disregard the wisdom of centuries, if they tend to subvert all that has been already done, they are not effecting the betterment of society, but its destruction. True reformers link themselves with the good already existing in society and war only against its evils. They will start with things as they are. Burke says that "the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation and a sure principle of transmission, without at all excluding a principle of improvement. It leaves acquisition free; but it secures what it acquires. . . . By preserving the method of nature in the conduct of the state, in what we improve we are never wholly new; in what we retain we are never wholly obsolete." True, progress in all the arts and sciences requires a certain readiness to experiment with the unknown and try something new. Yet if that readiness be reckless, disaster will surely be the result. Desire to move forward must be moderate, must be harmonized with distrust of the unknown if real progress is to ensue.

To improve society we must understand it, and to do this we must recognize its positive value. The work of social reformers would be more effective if they had a better knowledge

of existing laws and institutions. As a rule soap-box orators declaim against things about which they know little or nothing. A clear consciousness then of the good in the world, a clear understanding of the principles which bind this social world together is indispensable to the social reformer. To understand an object is to see through its defects to the positive qualities that constitute it; for nothing is made up of its own shortcomings. Hence we must place our faith in evolution rather than revolution. Any reform that is to be made must be founded in the good at present working in the world.

It cannot be said that Shelley had a clear consciousness of the social forces at work in society or of the good being done by the institutions of his time. He admitted himself that he detested history, and one cannot form a just estimate of institutions without knowing something about their history. Had he known something about the real history of Christianity or of the development of constitutional government in England he would not probably have been the radical that he was. He did not see that the institutions of his time were the product of the efforts of generations of men; he did not realize that the social structure is the most complicated and delicate of all the products of human nature, and consequently did not appreciate the folly of some of the radical changes he proposed.

Shelley had a horror of tradition and prejudice; yet a certain amount of prejudice is necessary. A man who would solve all the problems of life without falling back on tradition would be obliged, in each of the decisions that he would make, to follow a line of thought or argumentation which would impose an intolerable burden on him. According to Shelley, the morality of an act is to be measured by the utilitarian standard, "the greatest good of the greatest number." How though can we measure the pleasure and the pain that flows from an action? In many cases we must take the judgment of the race; we must be guided by prejudice or tradition.

"Prejudice," writes Burke, "is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled and unresolved. Prejudice renders a man's virtue his habit and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes a part of his nature."[197]

The radical lays too much stress on the influence of institutions. Shelley ascribed to them all the evils of society. He was confident that a remodelling of them would bring about a complete reformation of society. Social wrongs are caused by men and men alone can cure them.

The radical is so taken up with his own ideas that he soon becomes eccentric. He loses, too, all sense of humor. He sees nothing but tragedy confronting him at every turn. At Leghorn, Shelley, accompanied by a friend, visited a ship which was manned by Greek sailors. "Does this realize your idea of Hellenism, Shelley?" his friend asked. "No! but it does of hell," he replied. Almost every radical is lacking in tact, in moderation and in the sense of practical life.

The radical is apt to think that everybody is against him. He does not credit his opponents with honest convictions, and so he imagines that he is being unjustly persecuted. Shelley thought that even his father sought to injure him. "The idea," Peacock writes, "that his father was continually on the watch for a pretext to lock him up haunted him through life."

This brings us to several of Shelley's traits which are characteristic of genius or insanity rather than of radicalism. In his *Man of Genius* Professor Lombroso says that the characteristics of insane men of genius are met with, though far less conspicuously, among the great men freest from any suspicion of insanity. "Between the physiology of the man of genius," he writes, "and the pathology of the insane, there

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[197] Ibid., p. 82.

are many points of coincidence; there is even actual continuity."

One of the most important of these characteristics is hallucination. Examples of geniuses who were subject to hallucinations are Caesar, Brutus, Cellini, Napoleon, Dr. Johnson, and Pope. Shortly before his death Shelley saw a child rise from the sea and clap its hands. At Tanyralt, on the night of February 26, 1813, Shelley imagined that he heard a noise proceeding from one of the parlors and immediately went downstairs armed with two pistols. There, he said, he found a man who fired at him but missed. The report of Shelley's pistol brought the rest of the family on the scene, but none of them could find any trace of the intruder. It is generally conceded that this attack took place only in Shelley's fertile imagination. At another time Shelley imagined that he was afflicted with elephantiasis. One day towards the close of 1813 he was traveling in a coach with a fat old lady, who, he felt sure, must be a victim of this disease. Later on at Mr. Newton's house as "he was sitting in an arm chair," writes Madame Gatayes, "talking to my father and mother, he suddenly slipped down on the ground, twisting about like an eel. 'What is the matter?' cried my mother. In his impressive tone Shelley announced 'I have the elephantiasis.' . . . After a few weeks this hallucination left him as suddenly as it came.

"He took strange caprices," writes Hogg, "unfounded frights and dislikes, vain apprehensions and panic terrors and therefore he absented himself from formal and sacred engagements." It is well to keep this in mind when reading some of the criticism of Shelley. J. C. Jeafferson cites a long list of facts to prove that Shelley was a wilful prevaricator. Almost all of these can be explained away through the assumption that Shelley himself was deceived when he told something that did not square with the known facts of the case. "Had he," writes Hogg, "written to ten different individuals the history of some proceeding in which he was himself a party and an eye-witness

each of his ten reports would have varied from the rest in essential and important circumstances."

"Genius," says Lombroso, "is conscious of itself, appreciates itself, and certainly has no monkish humility." Shelley often expressed regret that the rest of mankind was not as good as himself and his soulmate, Miss Hitchener. He thought that he had no faults.

Another characteristic of the genius is that he must be continually traveling from one place to another. This is certainly true of Shelley. He seldom remained longer than a year in one place.

Shelley in common with most sane men of genius was much preoccupied with his own ego. He loved to talk and write about himself and his opinions. The most important of his poems contain pictures of himself.

"These energetic intellects," writes Lombroso, "are the true pioneers of science; they rush forward regardless of danger, facing with eagerness the greatest difficulties—perhaps because it is these which best satisfy their morbid energy." Shelley was always embarking on some foolish enterprise. He ran away with a school girl without having in sight any means of support. He went to Ireland to emancipate the whole race; and after this failed he set about reclaiming a large tract of land from the sea at the little town of Tremadoc, Wales. He finally lost his life through venturing out to sea in stormy weather with an undermanned boat.[198]

Matthew Arnold's dictum, then, that Shelley was not sane is a gross exaggeration. The characteristics of his life which would seem to uphold Arnold's assertion are found in sane men of genius. That he was abnormal in some ways cannot be denied. In a letter which Mrs. Shelley wrote to Sir John Bowring when she sent him the holograph manuscript of the *Mask of Anarchy,* there is the following reference to her husband: "Do not be afraid of losing the impression you have con-

[198] Guido Biagi: *Gli ultimi giorni di P. Shelley.*

cerning my lost Shelley by conversing with anyone who knows about him. The mysterious feeling you experience was participated by all his friends, even by me, who was ever with him—or why say even I felt it more than any other, because by sharing his fortune, I was more aware that any other of his wondrous excellencies and the strange fate which attended him on all occasions. . . . I do not in any degree believe that his being was regulated by the same laws that govern the existence of us common mortals, nor did anyone think so who ever knew him. I have endeavored, but how inadequately, to give some idea of him in my last published book—the sketch has pleased some of those who best loved him—I might have made more of it, but there are feelings which one recoils from unveiling to the public eye."[199]

Shelley always remained a child. This was the opinion of one of his greatest admirers, Francis Thompson. "The child appeared no less often in Shelley the philosopher than in Shelley the idler. It is seen in his repellant no less than in his amiable weaknesses." To this fact, perhaps, may be ascribed the luxuriance of his imagination; it is freer in childhood than in old age.

> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
> Shades of the prison-house begin to close
> Upon the growing boy.
> But he beholds the light and whence it flows
> He sees it in his joy.[200]

He has been described as "a beautiful spirit building his many-colored haze of words and images." For him idealism was more than a need of the spirit; it was the principal element of his being.[201] Anyone who cleared away obstacles from the path of his imagination had all the attraction of a

[199]Quoted in *Shelley Society Papers*, Part I, p. 94.

[200]Wordsworth: *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality.*

[201]"Tutte le circostanze della vita dello Shelley attestano come in lui la poesia, la visione, l'idealismo fossero, piu che un bisogno dello spirito, il principale elemento costitutive dell esser suo." G. Chiarini, Ombre e figure.

kindred spirit. This helps to explain Godwin's influence over him. His father-in-law advocated the entire abolition of existing institutions, and left the work of reconstruction to man's imagination. Here it was that Shelley found full scope for the exercise of his faculties. He cannot be said to have contributed many original ideas to nineteenth century literature. "He merely familiarizes the highly refined imagination of the more select classes of poetical readers with beautiful idealisms of moral excellence."

Radicalism is a characteristic of youth. Almost every person who is of any importance in his community will be found to have started out in life, boiling over with enthusiasm and eager to help on reform by advocating a change in this or that institution. Very often this interferes with their judgment. Bacon had this in mind when he wrote: "Is not the opinion of Aristotle worthy to be regarded wherein he saith that young men are not fit auditors of moral philosophy, because they are not settled from the boiling-heat of their affections nor tempered with time and experience."[202] Shakespeare endorses this in *Troilus and Cressida,* Act II, scene 2.

> not much
> Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought
> Unfit to hear moral philosophy.

That Shelley, had he lived, would have followed in the footsteps of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey and become a conservative may well be doubted. However, his life shows some progress in that direction. He had learned to become more tolerant of various types of men; and Stopford Brooke maintains that there are indications in Shelley's works to show that he would have become a Christian.

It is unfortunate that Shelley never came into close personal contact with a Burke who could take him out of the region of imagination and make him appreciate the beauty of order and institutions. Had Shelley met such a one he might have

[202] *Advancement of Learning,* Book II.

been influenced in the way that the Greek Augustine was benefited by the Roman Ambrose. Southey might have helped Shelley if he had shown more consideration for our poet's extremely sensitive feelings. Southey's pet argument was that Shelley was too young to understand the question they were discussing. "When you are as old as I am," he would say, "then you will see things in a different light." Such a line of reasoning has no influence on men of Shelley's stamp.

Aubrey De Vere, in a letter to Henry Taylor, December 12, 1882, states that Shelley's character had two great natural defects. The first was a want of robustness which took away from him stability and self-possession. The second was his want of reverence. "There is," he writes, "an insolence of audacity in some passages of Shelley on religious subjects which admits only of two interpretations, viz., something in his original cerebral organization doubtless augmented by circumstances that hindered proper development in some part of it or else pride in quite an extraordinary degree." Lest this should appear to give De Vere's complete view of Shelley I quote further from the same letter. "Something angelic there was certainly about him, something that I recognized from the first day that I read his poetry. His intelligence had also a keen logic about it."

The radical is gifted with a powerful constructive imagination. He feels keenly the failures of institutions and is led to construct an ideal state of society. He takes all the good he knows, joins the pieces together, beautifies and adorns the picture until he has formed an earthly paradise. This has its advantages as only those whose imaginations are fired by fine ideals will ever stir the world with noble deeds. To succeed you must, as Emerson expresses it, "hitch your wagon to a star."

Imagination has, of course, its dangers. Some are content to day dream; to live in the world of their imagination. They are impatient of the failures, of the slow, steady toil that pre-

cedes success. They forget that change works slowly. "He who has a clear grasp of a concrete ideal and a clear insight into the conditions, realization, and the difficulties in the actual world by which it is beset will be the true social reformer of the world."[203] Shelley had a good grasp of the ideal, but he did not know how to cross over from the ideal to the real. This journey is a long and tedious one. "All progress," MacKenzie writes, "which is guided by an ideal must be more or less of the nature of a stumble."[204] "Our very walking," as Goethe puts it, "is a series of falls." Bacon writes, "certainly it is heaven upon earth to have a man's mind move in charity, rest in Providence, and turn upon the poles of the earth." Shelley's mind moved in charity, but turned anywhere except upon the poles of the earth.

Notwithstanding all its shortcomings radicalism fulfils a very useful purpose in society. It keeps before our eyes the ideal. "It emphasizes the moral over the material; man over property. Its prominence in society insures progress and gives promise that ideals shall not perish; that hope shall not wane, and that society shall long for perfection and peace, without which longing no progress is possible."[205] Radicalism emphasizes the ideal; conservatism the real. Out of the two springs progress. "One is the moving power; the other the steadying power of the state. One is the sail without which society would make no progress; the other the ballast without which there would be small safety in a tempest."[206]

It is strange that the experience of centuries has not taught men to be more tolerant towards the radical. We see how blind was the generation behind us in resisting the obvious reforms which it was asked to approve; yet it never enters our heads to suspect that the next generation will consider as obvious reforms what we consider subversive proposals, and

[203] J. S. McKenzie: *Social Philosophy*, p. 428.
[204] Ibid., p. 42.
[205] *Am. Cath. Quarterly*, Vol. 28, p. 239.
[206] MacAulay: *Essay on the Earl of Chatham.*

will wonder at our stupidity in having offered any resistance to them.

Shelley was a "sentimental" rather than a "philosophical"[207] radical. He inflamed wills rather than enlightened minds. He roused men to action instead of solving difficult problems.

Man is influenced more by his emotions than by his intellect and hence the importance of the position which the sentimental radical holds in the history of society. If the radical arouses helpful emotions the amount of good he does is incalculable, so too is the amount of harm an unwise radical is responsible for.

The emotions which Shelley's poetry arouse are on the whole helpful. True a few of the details of one or two of his works should be condemned, but these usually serve to bring out the main idea of the work which is always an inspiring one. Nobody thinks of condemning "Lear" because of the vileness of Goneril. If we would interpret any writer's meaning and message the first thing to attend to is to regard the work "as a whole bearing on life as a whole." Doing this we will grasp what is central, and at the same time will appreciate the true value of all details. Francis Thompson does not believe that any one ever had his faith shaken through reading Shelley. He knows, too, only of three passages to which exception might be taken from a moral point of view. Shelley extolled Justice, Freedom and Equality; and he denounced tyranny and injustice. His poetry should inspire men to be more charitable and tolerant, to seek less after wealth and the applause of the world, to sympathize more and more with suffering humanity, to return good for evil and to pursue the common good of all with more zeal and enthusiasm.

One or more of the faculties of every poet are more highly developed than those of ordinary people. In some cases it is the senses; in others the imagination. Tennyson and Wordsworth are good examples of the first class. They note and

[207] Carlyle calls the philosophical radicals "paralytic radicals" because their theories lead to inaction.

describe shades of color—in flowers, in the sky—the music of waters, and a hundred other things that escape the notice of common mortals. In Shelley it is his imagination, his faculty for feeling the sufferings of others that is abnormal. He sees a woman afflicted with elephantiasis, and straightway imagines that he himself has the same disease. Shelley keenly feels the misery around him, gives expression to that feeling, and castigates the causes of that misery.

Shelley's poetry exercises our imagination, takes us away from ourselves and makes us think about our neighbors. The great trouble with the world today is that men think only about themselves, their own wants and their own joys. If we were made to feel the sufferings of the poor one-half of the evils of society would be eliminated. Anything then that brings home to us the evils of society is a blessing. "Every grade of culture," writes Dr. Kerby, "has its own spirit of fellowship, its own code, understanding and secrets. Hence it is that the imagination has a supreme rôle in the neighborly relations of men. As social processes unite men in imagination, they supply the basis of concord, service and trust. . . . Reason may talk of social solidarity, and economic or sociological analysis may show us how intimately all men are united; the catechism may appeal to intellect and tell us that mankind of every description is our neighbor. But only they have entrance to our hearts to whom imagination gives the passport; only they are neighbors whom imagination accepts and embraces."[208] The work of reconstructing human brotherhood is in a great measure the work of the imagination.

The objection may be raised here that although Shelley's imagination was very strong, still he was guilty of great wrong to Harriet. In reply one may say that the imagination is only one-half the mould which forms the perfect man. The other half is made up of reason and revealed religion. Where these

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[208] *The Catholic World*, Vol. 87, p. 744.

two parts of the mind are found together we get great men. They exist side by side in the saints. A man may know all about ascetical theology, or all about his profession, but if he has not imagination he will always be a plodder. To come more directly to our difficulty, Shelley had the motive power of imagination and the guiding force of reason, but not that of revealed religion. The result was that he went off at a tangent when he dealt with matrimony. His case should be a convincing argument to women at least that Christianity is necessary for the happiness and well-being of mankind. In so far as Shelley's imagination was guided by the light of reason, he was a saint. Trelawny says that Shelley stinted himself to bare necessities, and then often lavished the money saved by unprecedented self-denial on selfish fellows who denied themselves nothing.

Some of Shelley's poetry is calculated to arouse one's anger and hatred of wrong. A people who are destitute of these emotions are fit subjects for the yoke. As long as there are men ready to take advantage of another's weakness; as long as there are selfish men who will advance themselves at the expense of others, so long will it be necessary to keep alive in men the spirit of hatred of injustice.

The difficulty with a great many critics of Shelley is that they confound Shelley's railing at the evils of religion and governments with railing at religion and government itself. In places, it is true, he would seem to be a complete anarchist, but then allowance should be made for the sweeping generalizations that are characteristic of poetry and radicalism. Those passages in which he would seem to condemn all religion and government should deceive no one.

No doubt it is wrong to brood too much over the misery of the world. One misses a great deal if one sees only the evil, and never sees any of the good nor experiences any of the joy of life. Extreme pessimism is as harmful as extreme optimism. The pessimism that lets in no ray of hope is a plague. Such

though is not the pessimism of Shelley. His pictures of the evils of society are illumined by the reflection from the happier state of society that is about to come to pass.

Shelley would do away with government and authority. Surely, some would say, that is enough to discredit him as a thinker forever. On the contrary, it shows how far in advance of his time he was; it shows he had a good grasp of the sociological principle that the less compulsion and the more cooperation under direction there is in any state the better it is. Shelley never meant to say that he would here and now abolish all authority. No one saw more clearly than he that chaos would result from the removal of authority from society as at present constituted. When Shelley writes about freedom from authority he is picturing the ideal state where men will be just and wise. He very likely doubted that such a state was possible here below, still he thought it was incumbent on everybody to strive after this ideal. He wanted men to so perfect themselves, to so act, that laws and policemen would become less and less necessary.

Shelley may not have the "sense of established facts," and may be unable to offer suggestions which will work out well in practice, but he does infuse a higher and a nobler conception of life into the consciousness of a people. What Wordsworth said concerning his own poems is true of the works of Shelley. "They will cooperate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, and will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men wiser, better, and happier."

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